



The Elegance of the Hedgehog

Muriel Barbery , Alison Anderson (Translator)

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A moving, funny, triumphant novel that exalts the quiet victories of the inconspicuous among us.

We are in the center of Paris, in an elegant apartment building inhabited by bourgeois families. Renée, the concierge, is witness to the lavish but vacuous lives of her numerous employers. Outwardly she conforms to every stereotype of the concierge: fat, cantankerous, addicted to television. Yet, unbeknownst to her employers, Renée is a cultured autodidact who adores art, philosophy, music, and Japanese culture. With humor and intelligence she scrutinizes the lives of the building's tenants, who for their part are barely aware of her existence.

Then there's Paloma, a twelve-year-old genius. She is the daughter of a tedious parliamentarian, a talented and startlingly lucid child who has decided to end her life on the sixteenth of June, her thirteenth birthday. Until then she will continue behaving as everyone expects her to behave: a mediocre pre-teen high on adolescent subculture, a good but not an outstanding student, an obedient if obstinate daughter.

Paloma and Renée hide both their true talents and their finest qualities from a world they suspect cannot or will not appreciate them. They discover their kindred souls when a wealthy Japanese man named Ozu arrives in the building. Only he is able to gain Paloma's trust and to see through Renée's timeworn disguise to the secret that haunts her. This is a moving, funny, triumphant novel that exalts the quiet victories of the inconspicuous among us.

The Elegance of the Hedgehog Details

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Author : Muriel Barbery , Alison Anderson (Translator)

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From Reader Review The Elegance of the Hedgehog for online ebook

Ahmad Sharabiani says

L' elegance du herisson = The Elegance of the Hedgehog, Muriel Barbery

The Elegance of the Hedgehog (French: L'Élégance du hérisson) is a novel by the French novelist and philosophy teacher Muriel Barbery. The book follows events in the life of a concierge, Renée Michel, whose deliberately concealed intelligence is uncovered by an unstable but intellectually precocious girl named Paloma Josse. Paloma is the daughter of an upper-class family living in the upscale Parisian apartment building where Renée works.

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Elizabet (Alaska) says

I must admit this wasn't a 5-star read until the last 50 pages, which may actually make this a 6-star read. This book is beautiful for its underlying truth: we are all worthy of love, love that will surely be given, if we will but believe we are worthy.

My friend Rose, repeated the quote that referenced Renee Michel as being prickly like a hedgehog, but so elegant on the inside. For me, the section that spoke volumes was the Profound Thought by Paloma in defense of grammar:

Personally I think that grammar is a way to attain beauty. When you speak, or read, or write, you can tell if you've said or read or written a fine sentence. You can recognize a well-turned phrase or an elegant style. But when you are applying the rules of grammar skillfully, you ascend to another level of the beauty of language. When you use grammar you peel back the layers, to see how it is all put together, see it quite naked, in a way.

She continues, but enough here. Thank you Paloma, you reminded me of my mother. I can see her nodding her head in such agreement.

Lisa says

if you are an artist, a thinker, someone who longs for more, an aestheticist, a dreamer, a seeker.... then read

this book. it made me laugh and cry in a way that only a well crafted, well loved, well written book can.

Isabelle says

This is another moment when I wonder what is wrong with me... Everyone in France recommends this book! The premise is original enough that I was hoping the book would be a real find: within the same super high end Parisian apartment building live 2 misfits: the 54 year old concierge who reads Kant and Tolstoi in secret and a 12 year old girl with abnormally high IQ and suicidal tendencies. The first half of the book is an excuse for the author's long academic digressions on Kant, phenomenology, William Ockham, oh and Tolstoi. Nothing is really going on... When finally a semblance of plot surfaces, it is so banal that you want to cry... So much for this latest ode to French high culture! The only redeeming point about the book for me is that it made me want to re-read Tolstoi!

Manny says

"Philosophy is the disease for which it should be the cure, but isn't," said someone - possibly H. Feigl. To me, this engaging book is above all an exploration of what it means to be a philosopher. The author briskly dismisses common misconceptions: to start with, you don't need to be an academic, and indeed this may well be harmful. Really, being a philosopher is about having a certain kind of attitude to the world.

The two main characters, who alternately narrate the story, are both philosophers. One is a reclusive, middle-aged concierge, and the other a precocious 12 year old girl. They are both desperately lonely people who live almost entirely in their heads. Renée, the concierge, reads Tolstoy and Husserl, but takes great pains to make sure no one knows she's doing it. Paloma, the little girl, hides from her hated family and writes two notebooks: her Deep Thoughts, and her Movements of Life.

Both narrators claim to feel immeasurably superior to everyone around them, which has duly annoyed a good half of the reviewers on this site. I think the author is giving you plenty of clues that this feeling of superiority is to a large extent illusory. Renée is a Proust fan, and writes in a delightfully convoluted faux-Proust style which must have given the translator a few headaches. But, even before we get to hear her witty comparison of M. Arthens with Proust's Legrandin, we've come across Paloma's ditzy, neurotic mother and her constant insufferable references to *les Guermantes*. Paloma makes fun of her elder sister Colombe's absurd name ("at least I'm not named after a bird"), but oddly enough doesn't seem to be aware that *Paloma* means the same thing in Spanish as *Colombe* does in French. Her criticisms of the family's lack of sanity clearly need to be taken with a pinch of salt, given that she's planning to celebrate her thirteenth birthday by killing herself and burning down the apartment.

So why do Renée and Paloma feel superior? In general, why do people who have a philosophical attitude feel they are better than those around them? Barbery, herself a philosopher, offers various explanations. Philosophers read more than most. They have a proper understanding of grammar, something that's even more important in French than in English: the hysterically funny sequence where Renée vows to kill her neighbour over a superfluous comma is one of the high points of the book. But, above all, they care about things that other people find uninteresting, or don't even notice.

I was at several points reminded of Anthony Powell's *Dance to the Music of Time*, a book which has many points of contact with *L'élegance du hérisson*. Nick, the narrator, is rather like Renée; he's a colourless, self-effacing person whose main pleasure is to observe the people around him and slowly piece together the pattern of the Dance. Throughout the series, he's contrasted with the appalling Widmerpool, who busily, and with considerable success, pursues conventional worldly goals.

At one point, Nick memorably wonders why he thinks he's better than Widmerpool. His rival makes more money, has had a better career, and enjoys a higher standing in society. Nick comes to the conclusion that he really only has one advantage: sometimes he can laugh, when Widmerpool doesn't see that anything is funny. I hope Paloma reads Powell when she's a little older. I think she'll like him.

K says

My name is Renee, and I'm the first protagonist of this book – the hedgehog, as it were. I'm a 54-year-old concierge who works in a building populated by rich and powerful people who barely notice my existence. I'm also a closet intellectual and I frequently try to prove that to you by digressing into asides about philosophy, culture, and other topics. I alternate between sniping at the apartment owners for their snobbish indifference to my lowly concierge self (an image I strive to maintain at every opportunity while blaming the rich apartment owners for buying into it), and terror that they may find out that I read loftier books than they do (I'm as much of a snob as they are, if not worse, but I guess we won't go there – let's keep things simple, even though this book is ostensibly higher literature). Given the owners' apathy toward me, it's not clear what I fear might actually happen if they learned that I was an intellectual. Probably nothing. But hey, this conflict keeps the book going and maybe makes some kind of a statement about French class differences. I guess you'd have to be French to understand. But you don't have to be French to feel smug and superior about reading this pretentious novel. In fact, it probably helps if you're not French because then you're reading something foreign.

My name is Paloma, and I'm the other protagonist of this book. I'm a brilliant, precocious, underestimated and misunderstood 12-year-old who plans to burn down my apartment and commit suicide on my 13th birthday. I'm not sure exactly why I'm so unhappy. I mean, I can make all kinds of bitter and cynical observations about my parents and sister, but really, I'm not lacking for anything. I can tell you in lofty language about how life truly has no meaning, but for someone so bright, my thinking tends to be pretty two-dimensional as does my personality and my life in general. Although disliking your family is pretty normal in adolescence, it's not clear why, in all 12 years of existence, I've never discovered a friend, teacher, neighbor, or relative who might complicate my unilaterally dark feelings about humanity by actually having some positive qualities. But maybe this is part of what helps me sound like a 50-year-old philosopher even though I'm supposed to be a 12-year-old girl, so I guess that's something. In fact, I spend so much time sounding intellectual that, except for my melodramatic suicidality, there's little hint of the fact that, emotionally, I'm really just an early adolescent. A bit more attention to my emotional side might have made my character more interesting, but c'est la vie. I get a little more three-dimensional at the end, but you have to hang in there and I'm not sure it's worth it.

My name is ___, and I'm a reviewer for a snooty periodical. I just finished Muriel Barbery's *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, and my editor is expecting a review from me this week. To be honest, all the pedantic asides left me cold. They took me out of the story and weren't all that interesting. I kind of skimmed over them, but that's not something I could ever reveal to my readers. I have to act like I read them, understood them, and

appreciated them as only a brilliant reader could. I have to act like they enhanced the novel, rather than detracting from it. Similarly, if I poke holes in the characterization or plot, it might sound as if I didn't understand or failed to appreciate the depth of this book. When a book comes out that tries to sound like it's above my head, my job is to rave about it. This way, the snooty readers of my snooty periodical can feel even snootier as they read, even as they also feel alienated by this pretentious book.

I (Khaya, not one of the characters) wrote the above when I was about halfway through and feeling very negative. Now that I've finished the book, my opinion mostly stands. I will say, though, that the book had some better moments and was quite readable. It's really a 2-going-on-3-star book, as opposed to a solid 2 or a 2-rounded-up-from-1 book. Definitely didn't live up to its hype, though.

Chrissie says

AFTER READING THE BOOK:

I just finished the book and I suppose it is better to let it sink in before I do a review, but since I do not think the following statements will be altered by further thought, I will state them now. First of all I think many who read this book will say OMG, it's a fairy tale! That couldn't happen. Well I don't agree. I am not going to give anything away, so don't worry. What happens, could happen, although I agree perhaps not that often. One has to believe and one has to have a few camellias. I found the book, ie its principal characters, very annoying at first, then they soften and the book gets funnier and funnier and then it gets serious. You need humor in life and you need it in books too. Real humor that sprinkles in between the shit that life throws at you, me and everyone. This book confronts the reader with important philosophical ideas. This book is about art. It is about beauty, and more specifically, what is the point of beauty? Why do we need beauty? Why do we need the beauty that art, music, literature and nature offer us? This book is about our pets, about our daily routines. This book eggs us on to consider many, many philosophical ideas. Why do people give up? Why do we think life is absurd? Why do people play social games with each other? Why do we hide from each other? And do any of us clearly see what is happening around us?

Now, if you consider the above questions philosophical garbage, well then skip the book. Although you will in so doing loose an opportunity to laugh at ourselves and our world. Don't forget, the book is funny. Some may say I am way too naive. That's fine. Say that, but I will stand for my views.

Concerning the questions I had before I read the book - I don't think the disparate views on this book have anything to do with the translation or cultural differences. I think it is simply that people are different. We value different things. We are interested in different issues. It's that simple.

BEFORE READING THE BOOK:

I really am curious about this book. The reviews are so different, thumbs up and thumbs down. Is it that there is a cultural difference between Europe and the States, or is it the translation? Who knows! The English translation is entitled *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. Kirkus has already reviewed it, and they liked it. I will be reading it in French because no book is as good in translation as in its original. I am SO happy I have found a book here on GoodReads in French, maybe now I will get in contact with more French readers and current French literature. Oh, and I really was surprised about some comment that this book was no "Amelie Poulain"! Who would ever think that one country will only produce one type of book..... I have to remember to add to my list some books by Eric-Emanuel Schmitt, a French/Belgian author.

Eva says

That so many people love this book makes me fear for the future of literature. It is one of the most pretentious, banal "novels" I've ever read. In fact, "novel" is too good a word for its bloggishly self-indulgent, smugly insipid meanderings. Actually most blogs are much more interesting than this book. The two main characters (the concierge Renee and the young girl, Paloma) are hypocritical snobs who accuse others of snobbery. This intolerance is forgiveable in a child perhaps, but not in a 53 year old concierge. Renee whines about her lot constantly (and not in an amusing way -- she's incredibly tendentious and judgemental). She vaunts her superior intelligence, is very self-involved, and yet fancies herself compassionate.

The world view of the book is conservative. Renee worships the accepted canons of Western art, music, and thinking. She herself epitomizes the upper-middle class women she regards with such scorn. She is one of the most obnoxious characters I've come across in a book. The author expects the reader to sympathize with Renee, but she is boring and self-pitying, among other faults.

Both Renee and Paloma (the girl) think themselves unconventional, yet they are extremely ordinary in their views. They are humorless (this is NOT a funny book) and mean; they mock everyone they know and regard themselves as superior beings. All of their thinking is cliched, and their stale opinions are expressed with narcissistic melodrama and hyperbole, in elevated tones and stilted diction. Actually, the concierge and the 12 year old girl sound pretty much alike. The characterization is that thin. The book is full of stereotypes. Asia and Asians are characterized as "mysterious" and "inscrutable!" It makes France (or French culture) look bad .

The book has no tension but it does have some contrived action as well as a ludicrous red herring. The prose is riddled with sentimentality and cuteness, and the awkward "plot" serves as a skeleton for a host of trite, sophomoric ideas. A few basic philosophical problems are rehashed in reductive ways, and the narrators imagine that they invented these ancient conundrums.

Oh, and the writing is terrible: affected and clumsy. Forget le mot juste! Words are misused throughout. In the last twenty pages, the concierge weeps quite often and I guess the reader is supposed to sob along, but it's bathetic, anything but moving. The only emotions I felt were disgust and anger.

With so many wonderful books to read, why are so many people reading (and liking) this drivel?

Fabian says

An expert, uproarious parallel play of two extremely astute yet heartwarming consciousnesses! There are so many quotable lines here, observations that are immeasurably insurmountably profound. It is a book of paradigms, life lessons, needle point philosophies arriving from two different backgrounds. The Point: no matter where you are from, you can attain an envious intelligence & plenty a poetic articulation.

About the plot must be simplified by simpler minds (my own, etc.) as: la femme francois version of the English novel by Nick Hornby (& the adorable film with Hugh Grant it spawned) "About a Boy." (Although

the two main protagonists don't reference each other til after the first half of the book.) Refined & elegant (doi!), the novel astounds! You will very likely want to reread this one once again in your lifetime...

trivialchemy says

I recently had a brief relationship with a young lady who had studied philosophy at a university in southern California. The relationship was destined to be a brief one, as she left for the Philippines to join the Peace Corps just a week or so ago. On one of our last evenings together, she thanked me for something that I found curious.

She said, "Isaiah, have you ever met someone at a party or something who finds out you studied philosophy - - and then they just try to talk to you the whole rest of the night about random philosophers they happen to know about, when all you want to do is play beer pong and find someone to make out with?"

I'm not sure I would have voiced the sentiment in exactly the same words, but I know what she was talking about. Actually, for me these days my background in philosophy is fairly inconspicuous, but the exact same thing happens to me for my work in the space industry. I'll meet someone at a bar or a house party who has a subscription to Scientific American, and he'll find out where I work and then he'll tag behind me for the entire rest of the party asking my opinion about aliens, or string theory, or any number of subjects almost totally unrelated to my actual specialty or areas of interest except they happen to fall under the general heading of space sciences. Or perhaps in a rare case he might want to talk about space policy, or advanced propulsion systems, or something else that I do actually care about. But it's Friday night, man. Can't you just chill out? Let me get drunk? Wait... do you by any chance have a sister?

"Anyway," she continued, "thanks for not ever doing that."

Now to understand why I find it curious that she would thank me for such a thing, you do have to realize that we had certainly had conversations about philosophy. I remember one particular rant about utilitarianism, Mills, and his relationship to his father on a concert lawn somewhere. And I'm sure I made plenty of my categorically unfunny cracks about Kantian imperatives.

But the point was that I didn't bring it up when it was totally irrelevant and then refuse to drop it the whole night because I didn't understand that even people that love philosophy don't walk around thinking about philosophy all day (barring, of course, our dear MFSO), nor do they give two shits that you are marginally acquainted with a few Wikipedia entries on phenomenology. And even if they did, couldn't it wait until after we meet your sister and I've got a decent buzz going?

Well, this book is that guy. He follows you around at a party boring you with his pent-up discussion questions from a survey course on philosophy that his professor didn't care enough to work out of him.

Don't misunderstand me. My issue with this book is not the literary name-dropping or the dime store philosophizing. Some authors can get away with this stuff, even brilliantly. Kundera, for example. The difference is that Kundera is interesting. Whereas nothing and no one in this book is anything but a one-dimensional bore.

Who cares about these people? Why should I care about them? One's a concierge, the other's a privileged brat with the exact same hormones as every other 12 year-old girl on the planet. Now, you might say, that's

the point, Barber is trying to show that these people are marginalized, and look how beautiful they actually are in their minds and spirits. But they're not beautiful. I don't give a damn that they're smart. You know what, lots of people are smart. Smart people are a dime a dozen. That doesn't make you, or me, or Renee or Paloma a special beautiful flower. It makes them smart, but they're still completely uninteresting.

I mean, that's really the crux of the irritant right there. Barber spends half of this book droning on and on about how this concierge and schoolgirl are so unseen because of social expectations, and she would have them be redeemed because they are both intelligent and tender. But that's absurd. That's like *Good Will Hunting* without the dénouement. I'll say it right now, I don't care about Renee, because she's a concierge in a building in France. I read the whole book and I still don't care. Is it because I'm stilted by my class astigmatism? Please. I'm barely middle-class. I grew up in trailers and fertilized lawns for a living. I don't care about her because she is a concierge and has done nothing interesting with her life except sit in her apartment with a fat cat and read Tolstoy. And the ultimate stupidity -- the most absurd thing in this entire book -- is this ridiculous and unbelievable artifice that Renee has to "hide" who she is, because of the expectations of the upper class. As if they're going around with spyglasses on trying to root out concierges who have read too much Marx. What garbage! If I found out my concierge had read Marx, I would (a) not give a shit and (b) avoid her as much as humanly possible, out of fear that she would talk to me in exactly the way Renee talks to the reader in this book: interminably.

If anything, I'd be more interested in her if she were an ignorant working-class stiff. I'd like to know what her life is like, then. Carver writes about people like that all the time, and it's enthralling. Because he makes you care about these people and their motivations. Intelligentsia pretensions in a do-nothing concierge? Excuse me while I pour some more bourbon in this drink.

Same goes for Paloma. She's precocious, fine. That's charming, I guess, but it's not redeeming. She wants to kill herself and burn down her family's house. Wow. That's really unique. I guess I should care about her "plight." Or... just maybe... she's exactly the same as every other precocious 12 year-old brat in the bourgeoisie world and she'll get over it as soon as she discovers penis and marijuana.

I've read this book be described as very "French" in its casting of the class divides, but I think that's totally incorrect. The invisibility of people who aren't interesting is universal. The ethic espoused in this book -- that Renee and Paloma are profoundly worthwhile because they are intelligent and tender is unequivocally American. Only in modern western cultures would we say, "oh! how wonderful and individual that you are smart and feel alone! you are a special flower! everyone gets a participation ribbon!" No. A brat who wants to burn her house down and a concierge who has done nothing with her life except isolate herself are not special, no matter how many books they've read. They are every single uninteresting person that I don't want to read books about.

Don't even get me started on Kakuro, the messianic father-figure (or the absurd Japanese fetish that permeates the book like one of those guys that follows you around at a party talking about natural healing because he read the *Tao Te Ching* and thinks sushi is real tasty). He's a paper-thin romance novel male. Dominant, austere, "deep," and sexually unconscious. After reading Kakuro in Hedheog, I understand why women get so upset about male-fantasy portrayals of women in novels by male authors. This is the exact other side of that coin.

This was more of a rant than a review, so here's my summary for the book jacket: stupid, stupid, stupid. I was irritated the whole time.

Steve says

If you bite into this expecting a light, buttery, wholly unhealthy croissant, be forewarned -- it has some fiber in it, too. It's about two unlikely intellectuals. One is a dowdy concierge in an upscale Paris apartment and the other is an unusual 12-year-old girl living there with her well-to-do family. I like how their brainpower comes through in their ideas and observations rather than from the author just telling us how "wicked smaht" they are (to borrow Chuckie's phrase from *Good Will Hunting*).

Their outsized crania were not always easy to carry. Renee, the concierge, was **not** to the manor born (probably more like the servants' quarters) and she never seemed to forget it. She had a real thirst for knowledge, though -- an accomplished autodidact in philosophy, film, art, and music. But she never felt comfortable sharing any of these joys with anyone given what she felt the attitudes towards a woman of her social standing would be. The girl was a different story. Her cross to bear was how to carve out a niche for herself in a family that was all too comfortable with its elevated status. Her main weapon against the soullessness of life in the upper crust was cynicism. She wielded it well, sometimes to humorous effect. At times she may not have seemed real, but then you could say the same about the Coneheads, and if you recall, they too were from France.

As everyone knows, smart people don't always figure out ways to be happy. This is one of the themes. However, they might just meet someone with a clear-sighted appreciation for hidden beauty, an easy manner, and a rich vein of empathy for kindred spirits. Much of the meeting up takes place late, but is powerful when it finally does. The spoiler police prevent me from saying as much as I'd like.

In addition to interesting characters, a solid plot, and real wisdom to impart, the book was well-written to boot. I rarely think to appreciate how difficult a translator's job must be to project a distinctive voice, but this work really stood out. *Comment on dit "2 thumbs up" en Francais?* At least I know how to say *croissant + fibre* = still *délicieux*.

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??????? Ταμετο?ρο Αμ says

?πειτα απο 54 χρ?νια μιας ζω?ς μ?σα στη λαθροβ?ωση εν?ς μοναχικο? πνε?ματος,με ατελε?ωτα ασκητικ? αναγν?σματα,με χειμ?νες αρρ?στειας,με θαλπωρ? φιλ?οις,με αγ?πη για την ?νοχη ζεστασι? του κ?σμου. (Υπ?ρχει η κομψ?τητα του σκαντζ?χοιρου)

?πειτα απο 54 χρ?νια συναισθηματικ?ς και ψυχικ?ς ερημι?ς και σιωπηλ?ν θρι?μβων,μ?σα σε ?να απομονωμ?νο εσωτερικ? και μοναχικ? πνε?μα που μ?σησε θαν?σιμα τις διακρ?σεις και τις κ?στες,που αποτ?λεσαν δι?ξοδο για τις μ?ταιες ψευδαισθ?σεις των ελπ?δων της.(μυ?θηκε στον πνευματικ? κ?σμο γραμμ?των και τεχν?ν,
(ως αυτοδ?δακτος ο σκαντζ?χοιρος..)

?πειτα απο αυτ? τα 54 χρ?νια ασημαντ?τητας,συστην?μαστε με την ομορφι? μ?σα σε το?το τον κ?σμο.

Για χ?ρη της αξ?ζει να ψ?χνουμε το Π?ντα μ?σα στο Ποτ?.

Αντ? ε?ναι η Ρεν?,(ο σκαντζ?χοιρος)μια ηλικιωμ?νη θυρωρ?ς. Απο φτωχ? και ?ξεστη αγροτικ? οικογ?νεια,αν?παρκτη σχολικ? μ?ρφωση και με ?να "φα?νεσθαι"τ?σο περιφρονημ?νο που κατ?ντησε ?σχημο.

Η Ρεν? Μισ?λ που λ?τρεψε τη λογοτεχν?α και κ?θε μορφ? τ?χνης. Που μν?θηκε σε φιλοσοφικ?ς αναζητ?σεις και ε?χε συντροφι? τον Προ?στ,τον Σταντ?λ,τον Τολστ?ι,την κλασικ? μουσικ? και την ιαπωνικ? κουλτο?ρα που θα?μαζε.

Η γοητε?α της ταπειν?ς και ?σχημης ηλικιωμ?νης θυρωρο? μοια με αυτ? μιας κ?τρινης καμ?λιας ? εν?ς ασ?μαντου σκαντζ?χοιρου.(κρυμμ?νο επιμελ?ς "ε?ναι").

«Η κυρ?α Μισ?λ ?χει την κομψ?τητα του σκαντζ?χοιρου. Απ?ξω ε?ναι γεμ?τη αγκ?θια, αληθιν? φρο?ριο, αλλ? ?χω την α?σθηση ?τι απ? μ?σα ε?ναι τ?σο απλ?ς ραφιν?τη ?σο και ο σκαντζ?χοιρος, που ε?ναι ?να ζω?κι δ?θεν νωθρ?, σκληρ? μοναχικ? και εξαιρετικ? κομψ?»

Παρ?λληλα ?να 12χρονο κοριτσ?κι, ξεχωριστ? και ευφυ?στατο που ?χει αποφασ?σει να αυτοκτον?σει ακυρ?νοντας τη ματαιοδοξ?α και την κεν?τητα της ?παρξης και ?νας ηλικιωμ?νος Ι?πωνας ο Κακο?ρο ?ζου,με γν?σια αρχοντι? ?λης και πνευματος,ζουν στην πολυκατοικ?α της οδο? Γκρεν?λ 7.

Ε?ναι ?να Μ?γαρο με υπερπολυτελ? διαμερ?σματα γεμ?τα απο σν?μπ γαλλικ? ψευτοαριστοκρατ?α.

Εκε? εργ?ζεται ως θυρωρ?ς η Ρεν? και απο μια σ?μπτωση λογοτεχνικ?ς αξ?ας γ?νονται οι τρεις τους μια ετερ?κλητη επιφανειακ? παρ?α με πολλ? κοιν? πνευματικ? ιδε?δη.

Αντ? η παρ?α ?ρχεται σε πλ?ρη αντ?θεση με τους αριστοκρ?τες πλο?σιους και μαται?δοξους εκπροσ?πους της γαλλικ?ς τ?ξης.

Αντ? η παρ?α διδ?σκει και προβ?λει τη γν?σια παιδε?α και καλλι?ργεια. Την ευγ?νεια ψυχ?ς. Την αλληλεγγ?η των χαμ?νων στην υλιστικ? αχ?ρταγη κοινων?α ανθρ?πων. Τη συνε?δηση της ανθρωπι?ς.Την επικοινων?α με σκοπ? το ν?ημα της ζω?ς και ?χι των φαινομενικ? ζωνταν?ν. Και την ευδαιμον?α που οφε?λουμε να πα?ρνουμε απο τη ζω? μας,η οπο?α ε?ναι γεμ?τη απελπισ?α,αλλ? και μερικ?ς στιγμ?ς ομορφι?ς, σε αυτ?ς τις στιγμ?ς ο χρ?νος δεν ε?ναι πια ο ?διος! ?να αλλο?..ακ?μη εδ?..?να π?ντα ..μ?σα στο ποτ?!

Καλ? αν?γνωση!

Πολλο?ς ασπασμο?ς ?νθρωποι και ?νθρωποι!

Katya says

after giving this book a chance, i have decided that the only chance it deserves is to be methodically shredded page by page and subsequently dissolved, in its entirety, in a pool of ammonia.

the rampant fetishism of japanese culture aside (which is seriously so disturbing and surprising to come across in a bestseller that was written within the past 5 years), the plot is entirely centered on the interior monologues of two characters, two characters who are so unctuously trite and platitudinizing in their "petit daily observations" that I believe only the heartiest of misanthropes will take any joy in following the oppressive journey this book calls its narrative.

Jaidee says

2 " gee whiz...wtf do I say" stars !!!

Ok I am going to be cryptic or perhaps not ! The concierge, the little girl and the new neighbor upstairs will of course figure it out as will the multiple cats and don't forget those bloody camelias !

- Mama don't preach
- Get off the bloody soapbox
- Go on a date with Paulo Coelho (yes I did like Veronika Decides to Die more than this one)
- don't fetishize the Japanese
- pretentious prattle galore
- the protagonist is just as bloody snobby as the people she despises

Despite the above commentary there were a few passages of supreme beauty that prevented this little novel from moving into one star territory !!

Amy says

Even if I were to overlook the self-obsessed, banal philosophical discourses that dominate this novel, I would still hate 'Elegance of the Hedgehog,' mainly because its characters are contrived and unbelievable. The main character, a concierge for a luxurious Parisian apartment complex, is a self-taught expert in philosophy, art, and film, yet she pretends to be stupid. Her behavior is apparently explained by her conviction that people from different social classes should not interact or become friends. This propels the remainder of the plot, in which a wealthy, chic Japanese retiree moves into her building and doggedly befriends the concierge, somehow knowing they are kindred spirits. Even though she is lonely and fascinated by this man, she resists their friendship until near the book's finale, a finale which is meant to convey deep irony and meaning, but ends up feeling as contrived as all that precedes it.
