

**“AUTHORS ON TOUR” PROGRAM**

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# Muriel Barbery

DATES

APRIL 24TH TO MAY 2ND, 2009

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## Biography

Muriel Barbery was born in 1969 in Casablanca but until recently had lived most of her life in France. She studied philosophy at the Ecole Normale Supérieure and worked for many years as a philosophy teacher. Her first novel, *Une Gourmandise*, was published in France in 2000 and will be published in English in 2009. Her second novel, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, has been published in over thirty countries.

Muriel Barbery now lives now in Japan, where she devotes herself full-time to writing.

## About the novel *The Elegance of the Hedgehog* (September 2008, Europa Editions)

We are in an elegant hôtel particulier in the center of Paris. Renée, the building’s concierge, is short, ugly, and plump. She has bunions on her feet. She is cantankerous and addicted to television soaps. Her only genuine attachment is to her cat, Leo. In short, she is everything society expects from a concierge at an haute bourgeois building in a posh Parisian neighborhood. But Renée has a secret: she is a ferocious autodidact who furtively devours art, philosophy, music, and Japanese culture. With biting humor she scrutinizes the lives of the building’s tenants—her inferiors in every way except that of material wealth.

Then there’s Paloma, a super-smart twelve-year-old and the youngest daughter of the Josses, who live on the fifth floor. Talented, precocious, and startlingly lucid, she has come to terms with life’s seeming futility and has decided to end her own on the day of her thirteenth birthday. Until then she will continue hiding her extraordinary intelligence behind a mask of mediocrity, acting the part of an average pre-teen high on pop 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 new tenant arrives, a wealthy Japanese man named Ozu. He befriends Paloma and is able to seeing through Renée’s timeworn disguise to the mysterious event that has haunted her since childhood. This is a moving, witty, and redemptive novel that exalts the quiet victories of the inconspicuous among us.



