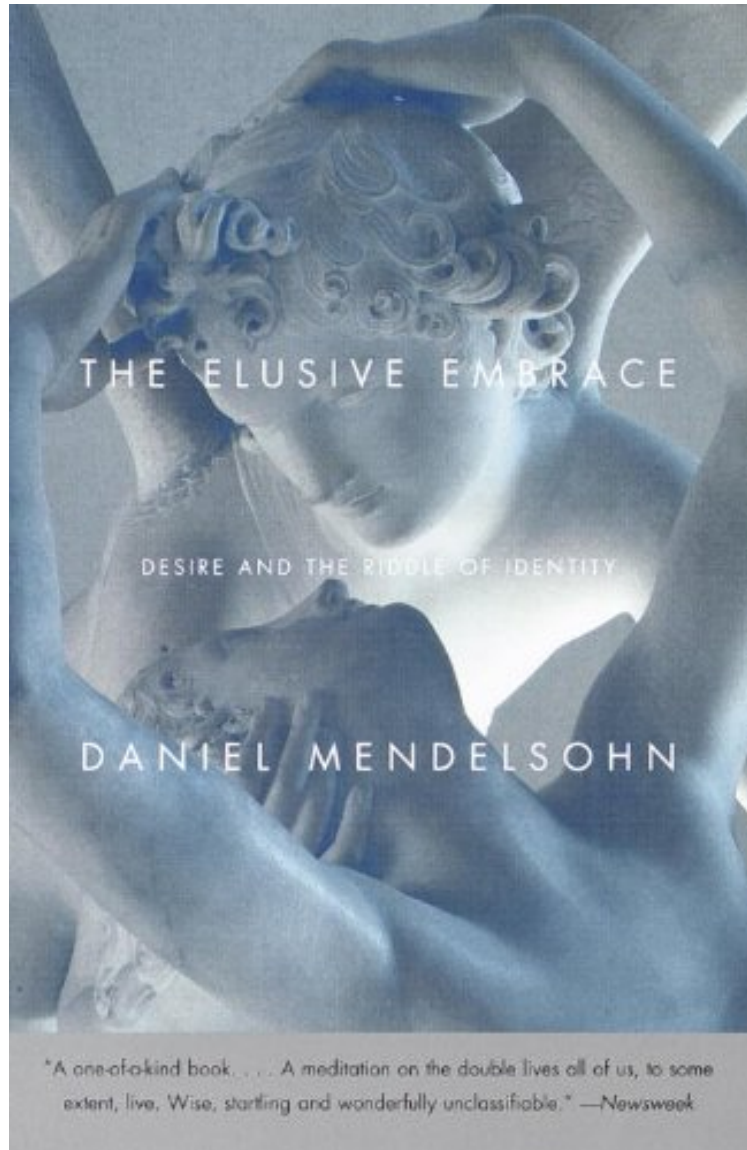


(Library ebook) The Elusive Embrace: Desire and the Riddle of Identity

## The Elusive Embrace: Desire and the Riddle of Identity

Von Daniel Mendelsohn

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**Von Daniel Mendelsohn : The Elusive Embrace: Desire and the Riddle of Identity** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Elusive Embrace: Desire and the Riddle of Identity:

KundenrezensionenHilfreichste Kundenrezensionen0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Well Written But Was It Worth It?Von Allen SmallingThe Elusive Embrace was well written but was it worth it? This is a memory piece by a fortyish gay male who interweaves his Jewish family's history, his sexual life in New York's

Chelsea district, his reminiscences of sexual coming-of-age as an undergraduate at the University of Virginia (the least graphic, and probably the most beautiful and evocative prose), and Greek mythology, at which, as a classics prof, he is expert (useful, but pedantic). Having achieved a sort of stellar lifestyle compromise--lectureship at Princeton, sexual freedom in Manhattan, and a close relationship mentoring a baby to whom he is almost but not quite a father figure--we wonder why Mendelsohn felt compelled to write about it. As the song goes, the author is "his own special creation." I guess all gay men are. I have a feeling, though, that Mendelsohn's life story was highly edited to make it more acceptable to a gay readership. We don't hear about what it's like teaching at an Ivy League school, and only passing reference is made to the author's heterosexual experience, or to his life as a graduate student. His life emerges as a coherent work with an awful lot of thimble-rigging, string-pulling and myth-quoting--more than would have been necessary in a more straightforward account. I agree with the earlier reviewer who said the author bit off more than he could chew. Beautifully written, but not too satisfying.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. a provocative book about love and life

Von Allan Brain This autobiographical "study" of erotic desire and family dynamics is very entertaining and its focus on classical mythology is stimulating, but ultimately a little disappointing. The author is a classics scholar, and perhaps it is too much to expect him to address more than a handful of Greek literary or mythic works. But when reading his careful and perceptive analyses of myths such as Narcissus, plays such as Sophocles' Oedipus and Antigone, Euripides' Hippolytus and Ion, I found myself wondering if he would ever go further to Achilles and Patroclus, warrior-lovers in Homer's Iliad, or to the many dialogues of Plato about love. This would be particularly appropriate for this work; one of the author's points is that part of the "nature" of erotic attraction is contradiction and antithesis. In Plato's dialogues, love is sometimes a cruel master that must be avoided or somehow subjugated (Republic), sometimes a "divine mystery" to be celebrated (Symposium), sometimes a force to be tamed (Phaedrus).

Mendelsohn's writing is excellent for an academician--it is sometimes confusing in his descriptions of his family and the intricate and complicated relationships. I found myself wishing that there were a family tree in the text somewhere. That brings me to an outright complaint. This is the second recent work of non-fiction I have read, by a scholarly writer on a serious subject, published by a prestigious house, that could have been much better, with just a little more work. How about an illustration of any of the mythology, literature, or even family matters related by the author? How about an index? (See my review of A Traitor's Kiss, biography of Richard Sheridan) But the book is definitely worth reading, and would probably be great for one of those gay reading groups. I found myself wondering, about the author, if he came to a book signing or lecture, would he be cruising the crowd for sex partners while discussing or defending some of these theories? His "defense" of promiscuity and casual sex is the most provocative thing in this book--and bound to stimulate discussion.

0 von 0 Kunden fanden die folgende Rezension hilfreich. Liked it, then Hated it, then Loved it, but now Confused

Von Jonathan Overall this book is extremely interesting and makes sense in many ways; it is one man's understanding of his own pursuit of the unattainable, be it the beautiful boy he could never have, or the beautiful family history that's fueled the passions in his life. In helping to raise a boy, he's giving his own life a sense of creation, consistency and perhaps legacy that all of his sexual adventures and all of his A-list friends ('the myth of exceptionality') might not always offer him. What I find puzzling about Mendelsohn's book, though, is that it seems to serve as a complex justification of his admitted fear or boredom or avoidance of longer-term love relationships with men. He admits to a behavior here of constant cruising and 'hooking up', and then moving on to the next person - behavior that might leave a certain amount of unhappiness in its wake, both in the author and in the real-life people that are his subjects. Does cruising really deserve to be elevated to something rooted in ancient familial and Greek myth? Mendelsohn makes the big mistake of universalizing this behavior as particular to gay men, but I just don't believe it. There are a lot of gay men out there that simply don't do it! Many of them are actually able to transcend their unrequited childhood heartbreak and settle down with one person for the sake of stability and companionship. Many of them are able to make enough of an effort at faithfulness that they succeed at it, for the sake of stability and companionship, despite the discouragement of long-term gay relationships built into the civic and religious realms, in the form of marriage prohibition. On the other hand (Mendelsohn ruminates quite a bit on the two-sided argument, built into the Greek language, giving expression to the elusiveness he is describing), there are many straight people out there, of both genders, that don't feel particularly interested in 'settling down' with one person either, and involve themselves in the endless dance of one-night stands and lunchtime rendez-vous in pursuit of the elusive thing their past won't let them have back. Many people even enjoy living like that. If these straight people are parents, however, we tend to frown upon behavior like that as being self-centered and inconsiderate. We often ask that they make an effort to stop compulsive behavior they are addicted to in order to improve the quality of their lives. Why shouldn't we apply that standard to a gay man who sees himself as committed to the raising of a child? I will admit, however, that I was mesmerized by his prose, especially during the revelations towards the end of the book. I would definitely read something by him again.

Kurzbeschreibung Hailed for its searing emotional insights, and for the astonishing originality with which it weaves

together personal history, cultural essay, and readings of classical texts by Sophocles, Ovid, Euripides, and Sappho, *The Elusive Embrace* is a profound exploration of the mysteries of identity. It is also a meditation in which the author uses his own divided life to investigate the "rich conflictedness of things," the double lives all of us lead. Daniel Mendelsohn recalls the deceptively quiet suburb where he grew up, torn between his mathematician father's pursuit of scientific truth and the exquisite lies spun by his Orthodox Jewish grandfather; the streets of Manhattan's newest "gay ghetto," where "desire for love" competes with "love of desire;" and the quiet moonlit house where a close friend's small son teaches him the meaning of fatherhood. And, finally, in a neglected Jewish cemetery, the author uncovers a family secret that reveals the universal need for storytelling, for inventing myths of the self. The book that Hilton Als calls "equal to Whitman's 'Song of Myself,'" *The Elusive Embrace* marks a dazzling literary debut. From the Trade Paperback edition.

deWhen Daniel Mendelsohn was growing up, he "secretly imagined a place where all the people were other boys, and where all the stores and books and songs and movies and restaurants were by boys, about other boys. It would be a place where somehow the outside reality of the world that met your eyes and ears could finally be made to match the inner, hidden reality of what you knew yourself to be." And while he's found that place in Manhattan's Chelsea district, Mendelsohn has only one foot there--his other foot is in suburban New Jersey, where he acts as a masculine role model ("not exactly a father but a man who would be present") to the young son of a close friend. *The Elusive Embrace* is an elegantly written memoir that shifts effortlessly between these locales, and between the events in Mendelsohn's life and the Greek and Roman classics that are his academic specialty. Whether he's elaborating upon his earliest explorations of his sexuality or teasing out the secrets that redefine his family history, he writes with admirable grace and delicacy. --Ron Hogan.com

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