



Gluttony: The Seven Deadly Sins (New York Public Library Lectures in Humanities)

Francine Prose

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In America, notes acclaimed novelist Francine Prose, we are obsessed with food and diet. And what is this obsession with food except a struggle between sin and virtue, overeating and self-control--a struggle with the fierce temptations of gluttony. In *Gluttony*, Francine Prose serves up a marvelous banquet of witty and engaging observations on this most delicious of deadly sins. She traces how our notions of gluttony have evolved along with our ideas about salvation and damnation, health and illness, life and death. Offering a lively smorgasbord that ranges from Augustines Confessions and Chaucers Pardoners Tale, to Petroniuss Satyricon and Dantes Inferno, she shows that gluttony was in medieval times a deeply spiritual matter, but today we have transformed gluttony from a sin into an illness--it is the horrors of cholesterol and the perils of red meat that we demonize. Indeed, the modern take on gluttony is that we overeat out of compulsion, self-destructiveness, or to avoid intimacy and social contact. But gluttony, Prose reminds us, is also an affirmation of pleasure and of passion. She ends the book with a discussion of M.F.K. Fishers idiosyncratic defense of one of the great heroes of gluttony, Diamond Jim Brady, whose stomach was six times normal size. The broad, shiny face of the glutton, Prose writes, has been--and continues to be--the mirror in which we see ourselves, our hopes and fears, our darkest dreams and deepest desires. Never have we delved more deeply into this mirror than in this insightful and stimulating book.

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