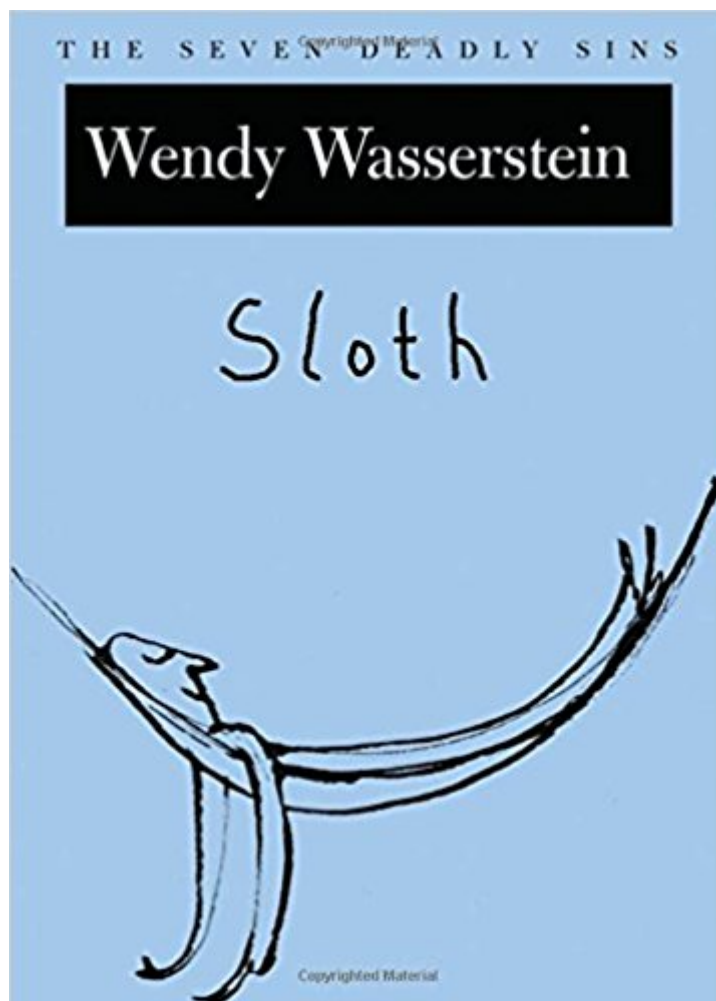


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Sloth: The Seven Deadly Sins



Synopsis

Here is a rollicking parody of the self-help genre, one that skewers the couch-bound, apathetic mentality so pervasive in America today. With tongue in cheek, Sloth guides readers step-by-step toward a life of noncommittal inertia. "You have the right to be lazy," writes Wasserstein. "You can choose not to respond. You can choose not to move." Readers will find out the importance of Lethargiosis--the process of eliminating energy and drive, the vital first step in becoming a sloth. To help you attain the perfect state of indolent bliss, the book offers a wealth of self-help aids. Readers will find the sloth songbook, sloth breakfast bars (packed with sugar, additives, and a delicious touch of Ambien), sloth documentaries (such as the author's 12-hour epic on Thomas Aquinas), and the sloth network, channel 823, programming guaranteed not to stimulate or challenge in any way. ("It may be difficult to distinguish between this and other channels, but only on channel 823 can you watch me sleeping.") Readers will also learn the top ten lies about Sloth, the ten commandments of Sloth, the SLOTH mantra, even the "too-much ten"--over-achievers such as Marie Curie, Shakespeare, and William the Conqueror. You will discover how to become a sloth in your diet, exercise, work, and even love-life (true love leads to passion, she warns, and passion is the biggest enemy of sloth). Wendy Wasserstein is one of America's great comic writers--one who always has a serious point to her humor. Here, as she pokes fun at the self-help industry, she also satirizes the legion of Americans who are cultural and political sloths.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Not as stirring as lust, as satisfactory as gluttony or as maddening as anger, sloth rarely commands

the passionate attention that the other six deadly sins do. Thanks to Wasserstein, however, sloth finally gets its due. In a hilarious parody of self-help manuals, she offers a book-inside-a-book how-to guide "Sloth: And How to Get It" on living a happy and guilt-free slothful life. The first step in becoming a sloth is to enter into "lethargiosis," a state which "breaks the cycle of excess energy and stored dreams." Her guide recommends a two-week course of slowly eliminating activity by counting activity grams and restricting your daily gram intake. She chides overachievers like Shakespeare and offers a sloth mantra: "S: Sit instead of stand, L: Let yourself go, O: Open your mouth, T: Toil no more, H: Happiness is within me." Sloths in training will learn the 10 commandments of sloth ("Do not wash," "Do not clean up"), the top 10 lies about sloth ("Sloth leads to mental atrophy") as well as strategies for maintaining slothfulness through diet, work (when you have to do it) and sex. Wasserstein's rapid-fire comic prose offers the perfect satire on a culture that continually invents more ways of moving less (television remotes, cell phones) in order to be blissfully slothful. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Playwright and essayist Wasserstein carries forward a truly inspired series of incisive musings on the seven deadly sins by Francine Prose (gluttony), Joseph Epstein (envy), Robert A. F. Thurman (anger), and Simon Blackburn (lust)--by offering a sly, hilarious parody of self-help books. Wasserstein claims to have tried every self-improvement plan known to addled Americans, from the Atkins diet to getting in touch with her inner child, until discovering the solution, Sloth, a treatise she now generously shares with her readers. And what a cleverly subversive send-up this is. Recognizing that life is unfair and that there's not a darn thing you can do about it, the guru of sloth recommends doing nothing. To that end, the sloth advocate offers 5 (10 is just too demanding) commandments--"Sit instead of stand. Let yourself go. Open your mouth. Toil no more. Happiness is within me"--and a program for achieving absolute indolence, the secret of a stress-free life. Splendidly witty and on target, Wasserstein's droll paean to sloth is best read lying down. Donna Seaman Copyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

I almost never give a book just one star in my reviews. If a book is so bad that it rates no more than a single star, I generally leave it unreviewed. The only times I violate this rule are when I run across books that not only are bad but also, in my judgment, harmfully bad. Wendy Wasserstein's little volume on sloth fits that description. Wasserstein (who, since this book, unfortunately has died) was a brilliant comic playwright. On stage, her satiric wit in plays such as "The Heidi Chronicles" is

wonderful. But why she was asked (or allowed) by the 7 Deadly Sins series editors to write on the vice of sloth is a mystery. She's clearly out of her depth. Alone of all the other authors, she has no obvious qualifications. Instead of thinking deeply and writing cogently about sloth, Wasserstein shoots for the easy laugh. Her approach to sloth is to write a mock-manual on how to cultivate it, filled with faux easy-steps-to-laziness advice. Given that contemporary American culture is so obsessed with busyness and careerism that fewer and fewer of us actually know how to enjoy leisure time, Wasserstein's jabs at the fast-paced and frenetic life are well-taken. The problem is that you get the point in the first five pages, and after that you look, without success, for substance. Even worse, Wasserstein mischaracterizes sloth from the get-go. Sloth isn't merely laziness; in fact, it's not clear that sloth is laziness at all. Sloth, as commentators from the desert fathers in the first centuries of the Christian era to psychologists and philosophers today maintain, is a form of despair, the inability to feel joy or gratitude. Sloth can lead to a dispirited lack of energy that leads to behavior frequently thought of as lazy. But laziness connotes a relaxed internal state that the person suffering from sloth simply doesn't enjoy. Neither is sloth leisured, nonbusy time. The latter is an opportunity, as Aristotle noted, for enrichment. The former is always a state of alienation and interior impoverishment. Wasserstein's failure to make these sorts of distinctions leads to a caricature rather than an analysis of sloth. Sloth, when understood as despair, may be the single one of the 7 deadlies that most characterizes American culture. How doubly unfortunate, then, that the volume on sloth in the 7 Deadly Sins series is so inadequate. Its easy conflation of sloth with laziness only legitimizes our present-day tendency not to take it seriously. And this is where Wasserstein's bad book graduates into the harmful book category.

Having read, re read and completely enjoyed Joseph Epstein's "envy", I was looking forward to another book from the series. Get that and skip this. I downloaded the sample to my kindle first- the introduction was a witty description of the self-help industry and the treadmill of self improvement. What I failed to understand was that was not merely an introduction to the topic, that was the book. I kept turning the pages waiting for an actual sociological discussion of sloth and was utterly disappointed. This was a similar experience to the discomfort and annoyance one feels when a Saturday night live sketch goes on way too long, completely killing any initial humor by beating the dead no longer funny horse. Waste of money. I suppose the intent may have been to repulse me with the product of laziness, to show what sloth truly is. It worked.

The New York Public Library and Oxford University Press conspired to develop a lecture series in

which some of the most interesting modern minds ponder the most ancient human foibles: the Seven Deadly Sins. The lectures were given at the New York Public Library and the authors were permitted (encouraged?) to rework them for publication. Wasserstein's SLOTH and Robert Thurman's ANGER are the latest titles to join the series (ENVY and GLUTTONY were published in 2003; LUST and GREED in 2004; PRIDE is promised for this spring and hopefully will come before the fall). Although I've bought all of the available titles, I chose to read SLOTH first (always having had a soft spot for this sin). It is not surprising that Wasserstein, an accomplished playwright, chose to adopt a persona to convey her message—that of a sloth guru, the author of a anti-self-help book entitled "Sloth: And How to Get It." The guru is so slothful s/he hasn't gotten around to forming a clear or specific sexual identity (At college, "I played sports on both men's and women's teams, and I had also danced the young male and female lead in the New York City Ballet's Nutcracker"; p. 19) Anyone who has tried all the new diet books, attended a 12-step group, guiltily read PEOPLE at the supermarket check-out line, or gotten caught up in church/synagogue, school, or office politics, will enjoy the many jabs Wasserstein delivers to institutions and champions advocating perfectability. SLOTH has the potential to become a modern satirical classic like C.S. Lewis's THE SCREWTAPE LETTERS or Ambrose Bierce's THE DEVIL'S DICTIONARY. However, unlike Lewis's great work, the jokes are mostly superficial, univalent, and very repetitive. It is, in the end, a one-joke book, and you could certainly accuse Wasserstein of taking enough trope to hang herself. My disappointment (why I only gave this very funny book only four stars), is that Wasserstein only occasionally reveals a serious concern with the nature and history of her chosen "sin." When I got to chapter three ("The Concise History of Sloth"), I thought that Wasserstein at last was going to start taking her subject seriously. And she does—for four pages (pp. 24 to 28), where she gives a very brief description of how "acedia" (originally understood as "sadness") was usurped in the seventeenth century by "sloth" on the Church's list of the Big Seven Sins. But wisdom can be found among the book's many flippancies. For instance, in her chapter on "Uberslothdom" she asserts, "True sloths are not revolutionaries... Sloths are the lazy guardians at the gate of the status quo" (p. 104). Hmmm.

Did not like the way it was written. Did not read it or gain what I was looking for.

Funny book Loved it. Have given it to almost every one I know.

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