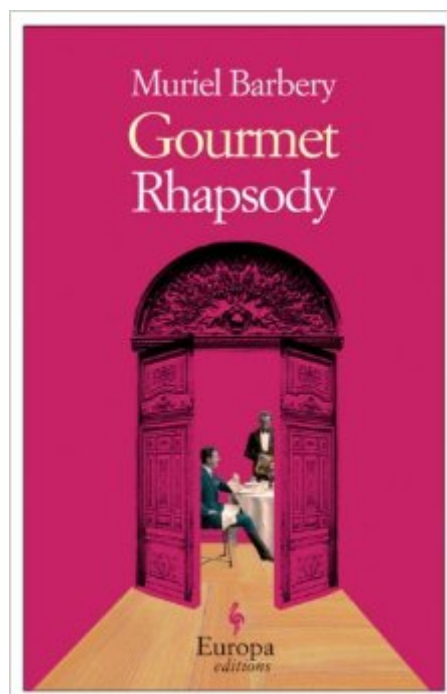


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Gourmet Rhapsody



Synopsis

From the author of the New York Times bestseller, *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*. In the heart of Paris, in the posh building made famous in *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, Pierre Arthens, the greatest food critic in the world, is dying. Revered by some and reviled by many, Monsieur Arthens has been lording it over the world's most esteemed chefs for years, passing judgment on their creations, deciding their fates with a stroke of his pen, destroying and building reputations on a whim. But now, during these his final hours, his mind has turned to simpler things. He is desperately searching for that singular flavor, that sublime something once sampled, never forgotten, the Flavor par excellence. Indeed, this flamboyant and self-absorbed man desires only one thing before he dies: one last taste. Thus begins a charming voyage that traces the career of Monsieur Arthens from childhood to maturity across a celebration of all manner of culinary delights. Alternating with the voice of the supercilious Arthens is a chorus belonging to his acquaintances and familiars—relatives, lovers, a would-be protégé, even a cat. Each will have his or her say about M. Arthens, a man who has inspired only extreme emotions in people. Here, as in *The Elegance of the Hedgehog*, Muriel Barbery's story celebrates life's simple pleasures and sublime moments while condemning the arrogance and vulgarity of power.

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Customer Reviews

Fulgurant.Succulence annonc e. Succulence foretold.Over half a year ago I posted at the following review of the French version of this work, and it is indeed a pleasure to have read the English version now, thanks to the Vine program. In retrospect, and after having read the English

version, I still would not change a word of the review: I first became acquainted with Ms. Barbery's work through 's "Vine" program, receiving a copy of her new book, "The Elegance of the Hedgehog" to review. I was quite impressed, rated it 5-stars, and posted a review under the Vine program. I decided to see what else she had written, and purchased this book while in France in October. The novel concerns the greatest critic of the culinary world, the "Pope of Gastronomy." Early in the story, one is told that he will die tomorrow. It is his history, and that of his family, acquaintances, even his pets. Ms. Barbery tells the story in 29 separate vignettes, alternating between the culinary critic (whose name we finally learn towards the end) and all the other characters. A literary technique that works well, despite the multitude of view points, which she sharply reduced in "The Elegance of the Hedgehog." Her style is rich and dense, like a wonderful chocolate *À la Clair*. Writing to be savored. The novel "works" on several different dimensions. There are the human relation aspects, a man who is at the epitome of his field, estranged from most of his family - his most caring relationship is with the servant who is now head of the household, and his pets. His wife, Anna, is resigned to his philandering. In the vignettes told by his daughter, Laura, and his granddaughter, Lotte, one gains insight into his dysfunctional character.

Pierre Arthens is a thoroughly loathsome man. His ego and arrogance is commensurate with his reputation as one of the world's great food critics. His writing and his persona has redefined the role of food critic in French society. He is also dying. His physician has told him he has 48 hours to live. In the time he has left to him Arthens is determined to remember that one flavor, that one taste sensation that could be said to have defined his life. Lying on his death-bed in his elegant Paris apartment, Arthens reaches back in time trying to recall moments in time and a 'tastes' in time that may mark that one great flavor. Each brief memory (in the form of a short chapter) is followed by the reflections of those who have for better or worse, usually worse, have had dealings with Arthens. These include his neglected wife, his children, a nephew, cooks, other food critics, restaurateurs, and even his cat and a small piece of artwork. That in summary is the plot and structure of Muriel Barbery's "Gourmet Rhapsody". "Gourmet Rhapsody" was Barbery's first novel, published in France in 2000. It set in the same building as a later work, "The Elegance of the Hedgehog". Hedgehog was published in English by Europa Editions in 2008 to great critical and popular acclaim. Subsequently, Europa decided to translate and publish "Gourmet Rhapsody". I think the fact that Gourmet Rhapsody was her first book is apparent. It is not nearly as polished and does not flow nearly as smoothly as Hedgehog. However, the book is still very much worth reading and if I had read it before Hedgehog I would have believed it showed a great deal of promise. On the plus side:

Barbery's writing is very fluid and insightful. There are passages that are just dazzling.

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