



Portrait of an Oyster: A Natural History of an Epicurean Delight

Andreas Ammer

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A decadent horror story (for the oyster) narrated with awe and gusto, Andreas Ammer's *Portrait of an Oyster* is must for all who find their joy on the half shell.

Once “a cheap form of nourishment” twice consumed to near extinction, oysters are now creatures with “more in common with art than with food,” Ammer says. Covering the veiled stories of oysters from conception to plate throughout history, his text is both informative and seductive. It discusses oyster classifications, farming, and breeding; covers a visit to a French restaurant led by an oyster “maestro”; and comments on oysters consumed in settings from Noma to Normandy. Undergirding this work is the violent, sensual opening scene, which narrates a slim feast of twelve: Shucked, their muscles severed, they wait, naked, to be adorned with lemon juice and consumed alive.

Lauding “the unique, clear taste of the sea” that the creatures carry, the book also waxes philosophical: “whosoever contemplates an oyster, contemplates themselves.” What cannot be known about the sightless, simple oyster is manifold, including about the “heavenly,” consumptive lives they lead before their shells are opened, and about whether or not they feel pain. Mysterious to the end, down they go, one by one, with a tender slurp and a final bite.

Funny, thoughtful, and tastebud-piquing, *Portrait of an Oyster* is a celebratory tribute to the “bewitching” mollusk that transforms dining experiences from ordinary to great.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (March / April 2025)

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