



A Pail of Oysters

Vern Sneider

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Vern Sneider's *A Pail of Oysters* is the most important English-language novel ever written about Taiwan. Yet despite critical acclaim, this exciting and controversial book has long been unavailable to readers. Unlike Sneider's previous novel, the humorous bestseller *The Teahouse of the August Moon*, this 1953 publication has a dark, menacing tone. Set against the political repression and poverty of the White Terror era, *A Pail of Oysters* tells the moving story of nineteen-year-old villager Li Liu and his quest to recover his family's stolen kitchen god. Li Liu's fate becomes entwined with that of American journalist Ralph Barton, who, in trying to report honestly about KMT rule of the island, investigates the situation beyond the propaganda, learns of a massacre, and is drawn into the world of the Formosan underground.

The *Chicago Sunday Tribune* said, "This book will hold the reader enthralled to the very end and will probably give him more information about this unhappy spot than he has gathered before. It will certainly not win converts to the side of the generalissimo." Indeed, the novel made enemies. Banned in Taiwan, in the United States it was denounced by Chiang Kai-shek's supporters: the powerful China Lobby. Anecdotal evidence suggests - and Sneider himself suspected - that his book was subject to suppression even in the United States by pro-KMT agents.

A Pail of Oysters is a landmark work from a time when novels were often seen as a moral force. But politics and historical importance aside, *A Pail of Oysters* is simply a good story well told. In the words of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, "The novel is touching, tragic and oddly gay sometimes in spite of this; a testimony to the stubbornly optimistic human spirit."

This Camphor Press edition comes with a new introduction and a brief biography of the author.



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