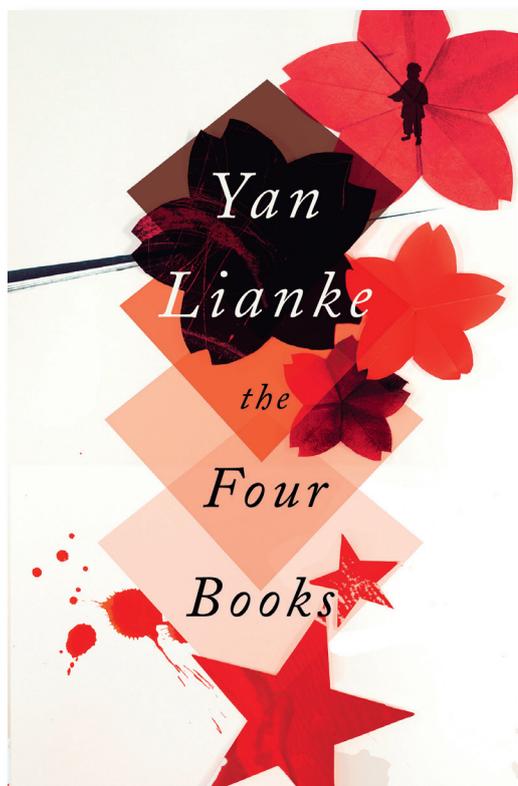


Reader's Guide



Other novels by Yan Lianke
Dream of Ding Village (2006)
Serve the People! (2007)
Lenin's Kisses (2012)

The Four Books Yan Lianke

Translated by Carlos Rojas

Chatto & Windus

www.themanbookerprize.com

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About the author

Yan Lianke was born in 1958 in Henan Province, China. He is the author of numerous novels and short-story collections, including *Serve the People!*, *Dream of Ding Village* and *Lenin's Kisses*. The winner of multiple literary awards in China, including the Lao She, Lu Xun and Hua Zhong World Chinese Literature Prize, he was also awarded the Franz Kafka Prize in 2014, and has been previously shortlisted for both the Man Booker International Prize and the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize. He currently lives and writes in Beijing.

About the translator

Carlos Rojas is the author of *The Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity*, *The Great Wall: A Cultural History*, and *Homesickness: Culture Contagion, and National Reform in Modern China*, which looks at Chinese discourses of corporeality and infection over the long 20th century. He is the co-editor, with David Der-wei Wang, of *Writing Taiwan: A New Literary History*, with Eileen Cheng-yin Chow, of both *Rethinking Chinese Popular Culture: Cannibalizations of the Canon* and *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*, and, with Andrea Bachner, of *The Oxford Handbook of Modern Chinese Literatures*. He also co-translated, again with Eileen Chow, Yu Hua's two-volume novel *Brothers*, and is the translator of Yan Lianke's novels *Lenin's Kisses* and *The Four Books*. He teaches on a variety of topics ranging from prostitutes and vampires to cities, migration, and disease.

About the book

In the ninety-ninth district of a sprawling labour camp, the Author, Musician, Scholar, Theologian and Technician are undergoing Re-education, to restore their revolutionary zeal and credentials. In charge of this process is the Child, who delights in draconian rules, monitoring behaviour and confiscating treasured books. The inmates – and hundreds of intellectuals just like them – must meet challenges set by the higher-ups: to grow an ever-spiralling amount of wheat, and to smelt vast quantities of steel. The stakes are high: they can win their freedom if they are awarded enough of the small red blossoms. Medium red blossoms and pentagonal stars are given out for effort, obedience, and informing on others. But when bad weather arrives, followed by the 'three bitter years' of The Great Famine, the intellectuals are abandoned by the regime and left on their own to survive. Divided into four narratives, echoing the texts of Confucianism and the four Gospels of the New Testament, *The Four Books* tells the story of one of China's most controversial periods. It shows us the power of camaraderie, love and faith against oppression and the darkest odds.

Discussion points

The novel uses an innovative narrative style which Yan Lianke terms 'mythorealism'. Can you find examples of this style in the book?

The novel's narrative moves back and forth between four distinct fictional texts. How does each text offer a new perspective on Chinese history?

Why do you think Yan Lianke has chosen to name the re-education camp commander the Child?

Themed reading

Frank Dikötter *Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62 (Peoples Trilogy 1)*
Zhang Xianliang *Half of Man Is Woman*

Useful links

<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/mar/29/the-four-books-yan-lianke-review>

<http://www.wordswithoutborders.org/article/an-interview-with-yan-lianke>

<http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/reviews/the-four-books-by-yan-lianke-book-review-looking-back-in-anger-at-maos-great-leap-forward-10158295.html>