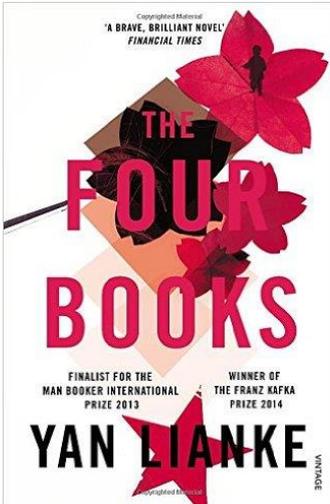


The Four Books



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. 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. *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.

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, 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.

Carlos Rojas is the author and editor of a number of books, including *The Naked Gaze: Reflections on Chinese Modernity*, *The Great Wall: A Cultural History*, *Rethinking Chinese Popular Culture: Cannibalizations of the Canon* and *The Oxford Handbook of Chinese Cinemas*. He also co-translated, Yu Hua's two-volume novel *Brothers*, and is the translator of Yan Lianke's novel *Lenin's Kisses*. He teaches on a variety of topics ranging from prostitutes and vampires to cities, migration, and disease.

Discussion questions

- How much did you know about the Great Famine in China before reading *The Four Books*?
- Think of the role of the translator – what do you think the challenges would be in translating this novel? What one question would you ask Carlos Rojas?
- What are the linguistic differences between this and a book written originally in English? Do you get a sense of the source language in the writing?
- Why do you think writers use fiction to discuss some of the darkest periods of their nation's history? What freedoms does it allow?
- How well did the book give a sense of place? Did you feel transported to the setting of the book?
- Which book would you compare this to if describing it to a friend?