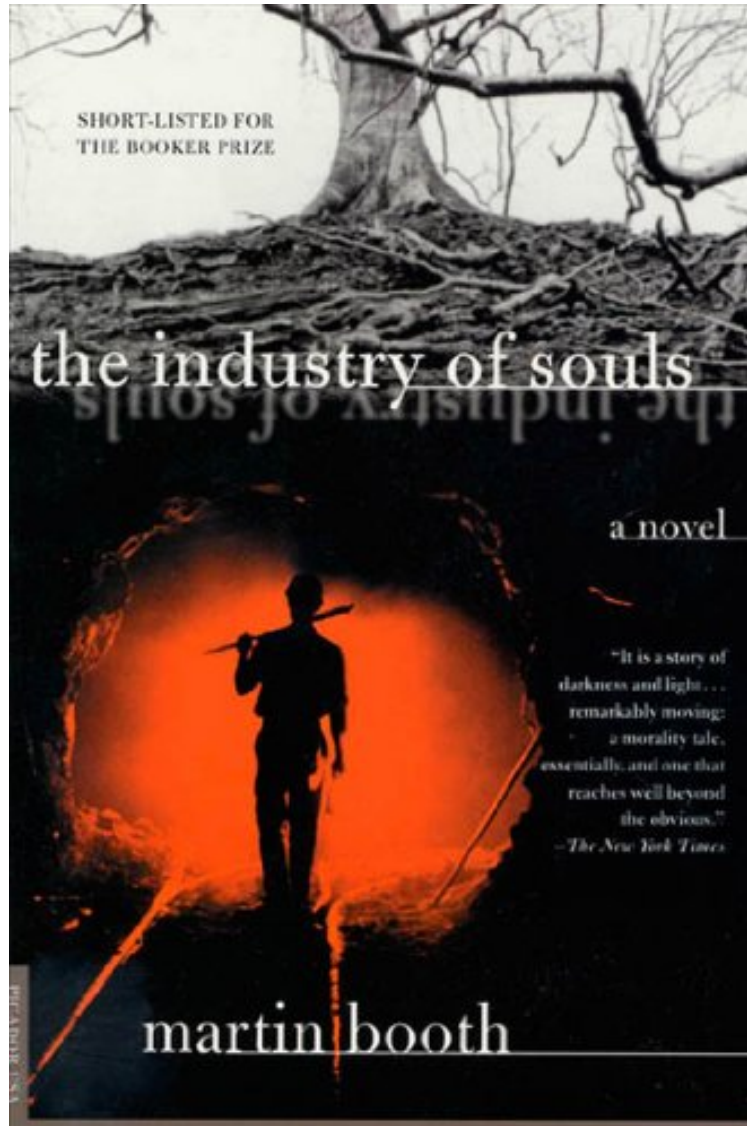


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The Industry of Souls: A Novel

Martin Booth

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Martin Booth : The Industry of Souls: A Novel before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Industry of Souls: A Novel:

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. The Village of Self-Knowledge By C. Adelman I knew a Russian village such as Mishenko. It's called Ovrashki, about 60-70 miles south of Moscow. As Booth walks us through it, its forests, its foxes and birds, its half-abandoned repair shops, its smells of fresh-baked bread, and most of all, its relationships, I am back in Ovrashki, leaning against the wall of a mud hut transfixed by summer flowers, watching a table being spread with everything eaten in this world, full of love for the people surrounding me, and full of

reflections in infinite variety of feeling and manifestation on the paths we take toward our inevitable end. In this case, the path was through a coal-mining piece of the Gulag archipelago, where brutalized comrades emerge with the same relationships, emotions, and self-knowledge that one sees in the post-Gulag village. It's a tear-jerker of self-knowledge and awakened sensitivity to what exists around you and through you. Well-done!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. What a journey the author takes you through and the ...By Rebecca MacMillan
What a journey the author takes you through and the surprise is where you end up with an undertone to check your humanity'
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. He had a superb vocabulary and tells a good tale.
By Sleepyshoe
I always find Martin Booth's books hold my attention and interest. He had a superb vocabulary and tells a good tale.

The Industry of Souls is the story of Alexander Bayliss, a British citizen who was wrongfully arrested for espionage by the KGB in the 1950s and sentenced to twenty-five years of hard labor in the work camps of Siberia. Eventually freed in the 1970s, he decides not to return to the West--a world he barely remembers and to which he no longer belongs--and instead finds his way to a small Russian village where he becomes a much beloved schoolmaster. Now, on the day of his eightieth birthday, communism has evaporated and Russia is changed. This moving story alternates between this momentous day to his harrowing past in the camp and his life in the village. And in the end, he is presented with a choice, perhaps for the first time in his life. Martin Booth's brilliantly crafted novel is a celebration of life in the face of death, of humanity in the midst of a system that robs men of their dignity. It stands as a mature and profound exploration of the meaning and the essence of human friendship.

From Library Journal
As he wakes up on his 80th birthday, Alexander Bayliss, a British citizen who spent 25 years in a Soviet gulag after being charged with espionage and the next 20 years in the Russian village of Myshkino, has a major decision to make: Will he remain in the village or return home to England, where his family has just discovered that he is alive? Through flashbacks to the gulag, Booth (Opium: A History) introduces Bayliss's fellow workers, from Dimitri, who always has a story or a joke, to Yuli, who is terrified that the coal mine they are working in will collapse, to Kirill, the leader who points Bayliss to Myshkino and in doing so portrays the human side of gulag life. Interspersed with this material is an account of Bayliss's experiences in Myshkino detailing the people he has come to know and how the collapse of the Soviet Union affected them. Relying on strong character development, this intriguing work illuminates the social, political, and economic changes the downfall of communism brought to Russia while remaining readable, personal, and suspenseful. Highly recommended.
A Joshua Cohen, Mid-Hudson Lib. Syst., Poughkeepsie, NY
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From Booklist
Briton Alexander Bayliss is a survivor of the Soviet gulag who, upon his release after more than 25 years of labor in an Arctic coal mine, has settled in the small Russian village of Myshkino. There he has eked out a second life as a respected teacher and unassuming witness to the evils of the fallen system. Now, on his eightieth birthday, he must make a choice, perhaps his first in half a century. As Bayliss makes his way through his day, he reflects upon the beauty of the Russian countryside, his camaraderie with his fellow slave laborers, and the many courtesies the people of Myshkino have shown him. Booth is a storyteller of rare power who makes the unbearable understandable. For example, Bayliss reflects upon the time he and his work unit were detailed to help dig a 20,000-year-old mammoth carcass out of an ice pack; the similarities between the powerful beast and the fallen empire are unstated but unmistakable. This was a finalist for last year's prestigious Booker Award; it's hard to imagine how any of the other nominees could have been better. George Needham
From Kirkus s
Much published in England but known here only for his nonfiction (Opium: A History, 1998), Booth offers a gripping tale short-listed for the Booker of the gulag and one man's escape from it. In 1952, on business in Dresden, the university-educated Englishman Alexander Bayliss is picked up by the Soviets, charged with suspicion of espionage against the USSR, found guilty, and sentenced to 25 years of labor as a coal miner somewhere above the Arctic Circle. The reader gets this information from a much later time gathering it from Bayliss's own lengthy reminiscence on his 80th birthday as he makes his usual rounds of the Russian village of Myshkino, where, for 20 years, ever since the end of his sentence, he has lived with the devoted young woman Frosya and her car-mechanic husband, Trofim. What led him to the village won't be told here, as neither will the cause of the special relationship between Bayliss and Shurik, his Russian nickname and young Frosya, who transparently reveres him. Why the villagers also venerate him, however, can be told the reason being that even after a quarter-century in the gulag, he doesn't hate them, insisting that they did nothing to him. For Shurik, an intelligently avuncular Solzhenitsyn-figure who only occasionally becomes overbearing, there is an absolute difference between political abstractions and real people. And, as he reminisces back to the suffering, cruelty, terror, and death he suffered or witnessed, it's the people who were there with him that one will remember: Titian, the math professor now imprisoned; Avel, who flew MIGs against Yankees; and, most especially, Kirill, the leader of Shurik's work squad, whose boundless humor, generosity, friendship and terrible death will explain why Bayliss/Shurik chooses to devote what's left of his own life to humble Myshkino. By turns terrifying and moving, an observant book likely to be long remembered. -- Copyright ©1999, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.