



## Wild Ginger: A Novel

By Anchee Min

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### Wild Ginger: A Novel By Anchee Min

The beautiful, iron-willed Wild Ginger is only in elementary school when we first meet her, but already she has been singled out by the Red Guards for her "foreign-colored eyes." Her classmate Maple is also a target of persecution. It is through the quieter, more skeptical Maple, a less than ardent Maoist whose father is languishing in prison for a minor crime, that we see this story to its tragic end. The Red Guards have branded Wild Ginger's deceased father a traitor and eventually drive her mother to a gruesome suicide, but she fervently embraces Maoism to save her spirit. She rises quickly through the ranks and is held up as a national model for Maoism. Wild Ginger now has everything, even a young man who vies for her heart. But Mao's prohibition on romantic love places her in an untenable position. Into this sexually charged situation steps Maple, creating an uneasy triangle that Min has portrayed with keen psychological insight and her characteristic gift for lyrical eroticism.

In Anchee Min's previous three books she returned again and again to the devastating experience of the Cultural Revolution, which defined her youth. Here, in this slim but powerful novel, she gives us a moving story that goes closer to the core of that experience than anything she has written before, and brilliantly delineates the psychological and sexual perversion of those times. Ultimately, *WILD GINGER* has the clean lines of a parable, the poignancy of a coming-of-age novel, the sexiness of a French blue movie, and the sadness of a truly tragic love story.

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## **Wild Ginger: A Novel** By Anchee Min **Bibliography**

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### Editorial Review

#### From Publishers Weekly

A happy ending is relative to what precedes it in this case, it stands in contrast to a horrific, true-to-life story about two girls growing up in Shanghai during the Cultural Revolution. In the late '60s and early '70s, Chairman Mao ruled omnipotently, and his followers took up arms in his name. Being a Maoist involved self-sacrifice, and that war between personal wants and the movement's needs indirectly pits Min's protagonists against one another. Sweet, na<sup>v</sup>e Maple is saved from her usual beating by class bully Hot Pepper when new kid Wild Ginger stands up for both of them. This is no ordinary blacktop brawl: Hot Pepper and her gang members wield umbrellas like spears, stabbing their victims until they give up or collapse. Since Hot Pepper constantly invokes Maoist principles as rationale for her actions, the teachers dare not interfere for fear of being branded anti-Maoist and taken prisoner by the Red Guard or worse. Opposites in most ways, Maple and Wild Ginger become best friends over their shared ostracism. Their friendship is tested when a boy called Evergreen falls for Wild Ginger, whose extreme devotion to Mao conflicts with her natural impulses. Maple herself can't decide who she loves best Wild Ginger or Evergreen and her dilemma leads her to put herself in mortal danger. Min (*Becoming Madame Mao*; *Red Azalea*) has created a memorable, unsettling love story using the horrors of Maoism which she experienced firsthand as a backdrop. 8-city author tour. (Apr. 8) Forecast: Wild Ginger is a more grueling read than the bestselling *Becoming Madame Mao*, and doesn't pack quite the same historical punch (it's hard to beat Madame Mao as a protagonist), but those who enjoyed Min's first novel will be satisfied by this one, which should mean strong sales.

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#### From Library Journal

In lean, expressive prose, Min recounts the lives of several young people caught up in the Cultural Revolution, which swept China in the mid-Sixties near the end of Mao's reign. The author, who was born in Shanghai and joined the Red Guards the vanguard of the revolution writes from firsthand experience. As in her excellent novel, *Becoming Madame Mao*, Min deftly encapsulates world-historical events in the lives of ordinary people without being didactic or resorting to stock figures. Her fully realized characters snag our interest and evoke our sympathy as they engage in acts of bravery or daring that make life barely endurable. She also has a talent for mixing irony with humor, as when Wild Ginger, the outcast protagonist of this moving tale, gains recognition for an act of heroism, after which her deceased parents (her father was foreign-born) are dubbed "international Communists" rather than "French spies." Highly recommended for all literate readers, especially those with a taste for foreign cultures. Edward Cone, New York

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#### From Booklist

Min continues her extraordinarily acute inquiry into the wounded psyches of martyrs to and survivors of China's horrific Cultural Revolution in her shattering third novel. Still drawing on her own experiences but eschewing the narrative complexity of her best-selling *Becoming Madame Mao* (2000), Min forges a classic tragic love story. The year is 1969, and gentle 14-year-old Maple lives in fear of the bully Hot Pepper, a violent little Maoist who even terrifies their teacher. But Hot Pepper meets her match in Wild Ginger. Beautiful and self-possessed, Wild Ginger is used to the abuse that her unusually light eyes and skin--her father was part French--provoke, and she fights back, thus winning Maple's adoration, even as she recognizes their differences. Determined to erase the taint of what's considered a shameful legacy, Wild Ginger is hell-bent on becoming the ultimate Maoist, even taking a vow never to marry. Maple is appalled by the cruelty and lies of the Communists, including their claim that love is merely a bourgeois desire. Later when the close

friends fall for the same young man, things go awry as they always do in tales of thwarted passion, but in their barbaric circumstances, private heartache takes on cataclysmic dimensions. As in all her unsparing, compelling, and transcendent books, Min discerns both the vulnerability and strength of individuals and, more disturbingly, unveils the eroticism of pain. Given our own times, Min's taut and compassionate tale of oppressed teenagers kept in ignorance of the wider world, children brainwashed into performing acts of violence and self-destruction, is especially urgent. *Donna Seaman*

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#### **Paul Jones:**

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