



Nanjing Requiem

Ha Jin

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The award-winning author of *Waiting* and *War Trash* returns to his homeland in a searing new novel that unfurls during one of the darkest moments of the twentieth century: the Rape of Nanjing.

In 1937, with the Japanese poised to invade Nanjing, Minnie Vautrin—an American missionary and the dean of Jinling Women's College—decides to remain at the school, convinced that her American citizenship will help her safeguard the welfare of the Chinese men and women who work there. She is painfully mistaken. In the aftermath of the invasion, the school becomes a refugee camp for more than ten thousand homeless women and children, and Vautrin must struggle, day after day, to intercede on behalf of the hapless victims. Even when order and civility are eventually restored, Vautrin remains deeply embattled, and she is haunted by the lives she could not save.

With extraordinarily evocative precision, Ha Jin re-creates the terror, the harrowing deprivations, and the menace of unexpected violence that defined life in Nanjing during the occupation. In Minnie Vautrin he has given us an indelible portrait of a woman whose convictions and bravery prove, in the end, to be no match for the maelstrom of history.

At once epic and intimate, *Nanjing Requiem* is historical fiction at its most resonant.

Nanjing Requiem Details

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From Reader Review Nanjing Requiem for online ebook

Brie says

I am a huge fan of Ha Jin and his writing style. This book is one of the best he has written, at least in my mind.

The book starts out following real events in WW2 with the Nanjing Massacre (otherwise known as "The Rape of Nanjing") by the invading Japanese troops. I was aware of this event and it was interesting to read a fictional story based during this time period. The story follows teachers at a women's college in Nanjing that protected women during the Massacre and then follows the story throughout the war and shows how the event changed the lives of everyone at the college.

It can be a tough read at times if the reader is triggered by rape and violence since the book describes instances of rape in detail. The event does make the background to a very compelling story and it kept me reading, non-stop, through the entire book in one seating. The story is that powerful and involving.

Shomeret says

I read this book because I thought a novel would be a better way for me to read about the Japanese occupation of Nanjing. Reportage of atrocities can de-sensitize us so that they have less impact and you care less about the victims. Fiction with characterization where you see into the minds and hearts of the characters and see their lives in context should make you care more. Unfortunately, as other reviewers have said this is closer to reportage than fiction.

One of the problems is that Ha Jin wanted a Chinese viewpoint character while choosing to focus primarily not on the viewpoint character, but the American missionary Minnie Vautrin. This is an odd choice. The POV character, Anling, a Chinese Christian missionary, vanishes behind Minnie Vautrin for long stretches of the narrative. Yet she emerges from the shadows very poignantly when she experiences an inner conflict over her son. This is a genuinely complex character dilemma in a book where so many of the characters are as papery thin as fallen leaves. So by the end of the book I considered Anling a better choice of viewpoint than I had originally thought.

I also discovered a Japanese journalist's non-fiction book about these events in Ha Jin's author note. Ironically, I am pursuing reportage. I put it on hold. I know that Japanese authorities have done their best to try to suppress any accounts of these atrocities, so I want to find out how this Japanese author managed to write such a book. It's The Nanjing Massacre: A Japanese Journalist Confronts Japan's National Shame by Honda Katsuichi. I feel that I ought to give this book an extra star because it's leading me to this other one that sounds so significant.

Vít Kotařka says

Zvláštní kniha. Vyprávěná z pohledu fiktivní přítelkyně skutečné postavy Minnie Vautrin, popisuje události Nankingského masakru.

Dalo by se říct, že pro nás Evropany, unavené záplavou knih o Šoa, jde až o "exotické" téma, podpořené stereotypem o asijské krutosti. Podstata je ale stále tatáž - býsy války uvolní v lidech to nejhorší. A ani po konci pěstátých hrůz nepůjde vykoupení, ale iasto naopak další křivdy a utrpení. Sama Minnie - pěstívaná Bohyní milosrdenství - je toho důkazem.

Zvláštní kniha. Rozhodně přitáhla moji pozornost jak k Nankinským událostem, tak k Nankingu samotnému (znáte jeho význam a historii?). Na druhou stranu mě tak nějak rozrušovalo, že přes popisované zvrstvá a drobná i epická humanitární vítězství, to ve mně nevyvolává žádné emoce. Nevím, jestli to byl záměr, nebo jestli se mi nepodařilo na knihu naladit. Ale moje hodnocení to ovlivňuje hodně. I když, možná je to dobře - doporučovat ke čtení knihu o masovém vraždění a znásilňování je... podivné? nemorální? sporné?

Manray9 says

Rarely do I quit a book once started, but I closed *Nanjing Requiem* after about 140 pages. Ha Jin wanted to write a history of the Rape of Nanjing in the form of a novel. The result was stilted, showing poor development of characters and plot, and without narrative flow. Minnie and Anling went here, went there, went here again, went there...the Japanese did this, the Japanese did that -- this doesn't make a novel. Ha Jin's *War Trash* was well done. It contained all the elements of a good novel lacking in *Nanjing Requiem*. I recommend Iris Chang's *The Rape of Nanking*. It is a straightforward non-fiction account without the feebly-applied fictionalized aspects of Ha Jin's book.

NyiNya says

Ha Jin never goes for the jugular. His cool, reserved style works to his advantage in "Nanjing Requiem. The facts are so horrific, that letting too much emotion creep into the narrative could take it over the edge into Grand Guignol.

The focus of *Nanjing Requiem* is Jinling Women's College. Ha Jin seamlessly blends real and fictional figures and locations to bring us into the center of six weeks of hell on earth. As the Japanese advance, Chaing Kai-shek flees to Chongqing; he leaves his armies in disarray, his people abandoned. A handful of westerners form a safety zone, for their own protection and to provide asylum to the Chinese who cannot evacuate. Minnie Vautrin, president of Jinling, prepares for an influx of 2,500 refugees onto the grounds of this sedate institution. Instead, more than four times that number cram themselves into its precarious shelter.

Ms. Vautrin is one of the 'real' people who populate the book. She is an American missionary, organized, capable and utterly conventional. She is not at all what we imagine when we think of heroes. But Minnie rises to the occasion...along with a ragbag collection of missionaries, bureaucrats and papershuffler who stayed behind in the besieged city and firmly wedged their own bodies between the Chinese people and the savage onslaught of the Japanese.

Everyone has heard of the famous Chinese curse: May you live in interesting times. When we meet Ms. Vautrin and her colleagues, their biggest problem is the scarcity of jam for their breakfast toast. Her greatest contribution to the school: planting its famous rose garden. They are typical and vaguely silly examples of small town academic naivete and missionary innocence. It's not until things get interesting that we see what incredible stuff this little band is made of.

The story is narrated by Vautrin's associate, Anling. She is Ha Jin's fictional wheelhorse character, a Chinese woman, educated and with "western" sensibilities. Her daughter is married to a Chinese soldier, her husband is a Japanese sympathizer, and her son has enlisted on the side of the Japanese and serves in the occupying army. Now there's a family dinner one wouldn't want to miss.

The story opens with an incredible first line: "Finally Ban began to talk." Ban is a young boy, sent out by Minne and Anling, to gather information about the Japanese, see what is happening in the city. Ban is gone for several days. What he sees renders him literally speechless. Even before the city's official surrender, before the official occupation, the Japanese are humiliating, raping, killing and torturing the Chinese. No one is safe from them, not infants, not the elderly.

Once the city falls, things get worse. The Japanese army was sent in to punish the Chinese. Soldiers were encouraged to behave in the most savage and inhumane ways...and they did. Big time. The army of the emperor massacred 200,000 Chinese in just six weeks, according to the International Military Tribunal of the Far East. Before Nanjing's fall, Prince Yasuhiko Asaka -- uncle of Emperor Hirohito -- issued a secret order to "Kill all captives." Chinese men were rounded up as prisoners-of-war and murdered en masse, used for bayonet practice, or burned and buried alive. The Nanjing Massacre is also noteworthy for the barbaric treatment of Chinese women. Japanese soldiers raped and brutalized countless thousands.

The tiny group of Westerners who confronted the Japanese had no guarantee they would not be added to the hit list; nevertheless, they stood up to the ravaging hordes and maintained the security of their sanctuaries as best they could. They learned to scrounge and scavenge for food, for fuel, for the essentials of survival. They were not fearless; just unstoppable and indomitable.

There is a certain charm in the way Ha Jin depicts Vautrin's courage under fire. The campus offers shelter only to women. Initially she is concerned that men will sneak in and get drunk. The cook is stealing from their rice supply; this offends her sensibilities. She knows all Chinese servants skim, but this is an Emergency. Really, he should know better. She is upset that the Chinese she has taken in won't queue up neatly and wander about trampling her carefully tended lawns. Before very long, she is so desperate to find food that bribery, theft and law-breaking mean little. Unruly lines and lawn care cease to be her chief worry. Facing down blood-crazed Japanese armed with bayonets takes up too much of her time for silly incidentals.

In all, the "safety zones" sheltered and saved 250,000 Chinese. John Rabe, the "good nazi of Nanjing," another real person, gets some rare recognition in this book. He was the local contact for Siemens, your typical middle management type, about as heroic as his suspenders. But he forms part of this incredible group of true heroes who managed to pull a miracle of salvation and survival out of an abyss of slaughter. The massacre is hard to imagine; even the modicum of safety they offered was more illusory than real. Japanese invaded the campus, Women were raped, assaults were frequent. It was only the bravado -- and perhaps decency -- of Vautrin and her colleagues that kept the Japanese at bay. She did not see it that way and viewed her efforts as unsuccessful.

Real heroes are never celebrated. Had it not been for Stephen Spielberg, no one would know of Oskar Schindler. John Rabe is largely unknown. Minnie Vautrin didn't get a parade. When the bloodshed ended, she looked around and saw how small her contribution was, how few people she saved in that ocean of murder, and took her own life.

The Japanese government continues to dispute what happened in Nanjing. U.S. students are taught that Chiang Kai-Shek was a hero. We continue to make war on one another. We tell our children that ballplayers

good role models.

This is a book worth reading. Thank you for your patience.

Kristen Carannante says

Nanjing Requiem is a story of courage and conviction in the face of unspeakable atrocity.

Minnie Vautrin is the American dean of the Jinling Women's College. On the eve of the Japanese invasion of Nanjing in 1937, when most foreigners are leaving for their own safety, Minnie remains and turns the campus into a refugee center for women and children, believing that her status as an American will ensure the safety of the refugees and the staff of the college who remain on with her. Her mistaken belief causes her to be a witness to unimaginable crimes against humanity.

Minnie uses everything in her power -- among them, political influence, money, bribery, invoking the fear of God, guilt -- to try to protect as many of the 10,000 refugees who were housed on her campus at the height of the occupation. She remains to pick up the pieces after order is restored to Nanjing, creating a vocational school to help widows and orphans begin to make a living for themselves.

Following Minnie from her innocent beginnings to her eventual realization, but never acceptance, that many cannot be saved is not an easy read, but an inspirational one.

Ha Jin has brought to vivid life this horribly violent time in China's history, much like he brought to life the Cultural Revolution in his novel *Waiting*. His story has the amazing ability to pull humanity, love, compassion, and peace from the ashes of war.

Chris says

While I found the opening sections of this book riveting and horrifying the slow pace and dwelling on minute details left me struggling to keep up my interest as the novel progressed. Clearly a subject worthy of exploration and revelation but I couldn't help but compare it unfavorably with classic historical novelizations like "All Quiet on the Western Front" or last year's "The Sojourn."

Susan Emmet says

This historical novel is my introduction to the work of Ha Jin. I will follow up on reading him. However, as horrific as the detailing is of the utter destruction of life in the Nanjing area just prior to World War II, and as potentially uplifting the stories of American and Chinese missionaries, aid workers and teachers are, somehow the novel read "flat" for me.

Minnie Vautrin and all those affiliated with Jinling College were dedicated to their work. But I was most drawn to the life story of Anling who serves as a sort of narrator or interpreter of the novel. As a Chinese national with a complicated family history, she draws me in most often.

The horror of the destruction, setting up and managing the college buildings for 10,000 refugees, dealing with local Chinese and Japanese politicians and soldiers, trying to rescue/save so many, is certainly deeply

moving, as is Minnie's eventual collapse and suicide. The novel does raise several key questions: What is the price of collaboration? What should Christian (or Jewish or Buddhist or Muslim) believers do when confronted with evil-beyond-imagining? In the midst of war, what is important to preserve, to build, to affirm?

Lara says

I'd certainly give this book a star and a half. I didn't like Jin's approach to the book, while I honestly believe this subject matter of this book is extremely important, as most people don't know much about the massacres of the Chinese during World War 2.

I wanted to like this book. I found the book to be dry and lifeless. While by no means is the massacre of Nanjing during World War 2 a happy subject, I just felt that this story while historically accurate was far less passionate than other books written on the subject. It made me feel indifferent and bored as I progressed, which is what I'd really not like to feel on such a horrid subject. Make me angry, make me care, but don't make me put the book down and not want to finish it due to lack of interest in historical characters. Iris Chang took a far more passionate approach and it came out in her book. I feel like the book that Jin has written here, is based mostly on her research, which is disappointing.

Marjorie Snook says

I really wanted to like this book. Jin's *Waiting* and *The Crazy* are two of my favorite books, and I pre-ordered this book on Amazon so I could get it as soon as it came out.

I was underwhelmed, though. While I did learn a lot about the occupation of Nanjing, and especially the role of foreigners in the city during the time, the book was strangely unengaging. The book is all told at a strange emotional remove, making the storytelling seem wooden and sometimes strained. Jin also had the very bad habit of not telling things as they happen sequentially, but mentioning past events only when they are part of the arc of the current event. This is no simply non-chronological storytelling, but instead a fractured, discontinuous narrative. Instead of letting all of the events build together, story arcs are pulled out and dealt with somewhat separately, so that it is a series of vignettes and not one arcing narrative.

Sometimes I wondered if the storytelling was hampered by the fact that it is about actual people and actual events, and it made Jin hesitant to write with his normal emotional resonance because he didn't want to climb into the heads of actual people. The story seemed particularly ill-served by the first-person narration of his fictionalized character, nothing more than a cipher that Jin used to tell the stories of the other people.

The tragic arc of Minnie Vautrin is so moving, but its real emotional power was lost a bit in this disjointed and detached novel.

Annette says

Sadly, I don't have anything positive to say about this book. It's been on my to-read list for ages, and I've

long been interested in the story of the Nanjing massacre. Nanjing Requiem was a major disappointment, and it read to me as if written in the simple language of a 10 year old. That in itself isn't a crime, but it was also devoid of life, colour and personality.

The characters (based on real people living in Nanjing during the Japanese occupation) are one dimensional, and the prose is mundane and lacks heart. The emotions you would expect of people who witnessed countless atrocities perpetrated against the Chinese, are understated.

Out for a walk one day, two women who run a refugee camp in the grounds of a university come across a pond which is the dumping ground for the bodies of slaughtered men, women and children. All the bodies had bayonet wounds, one woman had a breast cut off, a child had his head smashed in, and a few had their necks slashed. Can you imagine the horror of coming across this scene?

Here's an excerpt from the book where the two women find the bodies:

.....Beyond him lay a middle-aged man, perhaps his father, shot in the face and his hands tied with gaiters; his right hand had a sixth finger.

"The Japanese are savages!" I said.

"We should count how many were killed here," Minnie suggested.

"All right."

Together we began counting, walking clockwise along the waterside. Minnie used a stick to part the reeds and pampas grass that obscured some corpses, while I recorded our count in my small notebook.....

Wow, the Japanese are savages! You think? A child with his head smashed in, a women with her breast hacked off - let's just do a walk around and count the bodies. Good suggestion. That will help immensely.

The matter of fact way in which these events are recorded, is thematic throughout the book. I don't know if that was the way Ha Jin intended to write this book, but I would imagine any normal people living with these atrocities would be sickened, fearful, hysterical perhaps. But not in this book. Everything is matter-of-fact. No displays of emotion. No expressions of sorrow, or anger against the Japanese. In fact at one point, a Chinese man is admonished by Minnie because he hates the Japanese. His city has just been devastated and burned, tens of thousands of people have been murdered, countless women raped and beaten and thrown away like rag dolls, and he's asked why he hates the Japanese???

I had to ask myself why I persevered when it was clear that this book wasn't going to get any better. I stuck it out for 120 pages, and threw in the towel. I should add that I very rarely give up on a book, but life is too short to read bad novels, and I'm sure there are better accounts of this dark period of history. This piece of dry, underwhelming, uninteresting pulp does little to illustrate the brutal reality of the Nanjing massacre.

Dymbula says

Poctivá ?ty?ka hv?zdi?ek. Autor dokázal, že mi až do konce nep?išlo, že to psal chlap. Klobouk dol?. A krom? toho obdivuji jeho schopnost z?stat popisný a hlídat si emoce p?i popisu takových prasáren. Obdivuhodné ?tení. A smutné.

Tara Chevrestit says

I appreciate what the author has done here: educated us about the rape Nanjing. I didn't know a thing about it till I picked up this book. But where I was expecting a historical novel about a strong missionary woman named Minnie, I got just what I said above, the rape of Nanjing.

The first part of the book... is one brutality after another, page after page of rape, sexual molesting and deforming of women, head slashing, and even urinating on children. The Japanese committed the foulest of acts.

The second part is the aftermath. The raped women are now pregnant or committing suicide. Older women are sent home from the refuge only to be raped in the streets. Food is going missing from the soup kitchen. The world is not hearing the right story of Nanjing. Women are trying to get their husbands out of prison/work camps.

In the third part, Minnie tries to pick up the pieces of what is left of her school.

This was supposed to be a novel, but it read more like a war report. It completely lacked a personal feel. The narrator had a husband and children and rarely said anything about them. I didn't learn anything about Minnie that I couldn't find by googling or looking at Wiki. I wanted inside her head. I never got there. Where does she sleep? Does she cry herself to sleep? How does she FEEL? What were her hopes and dreams? Her past? It told me about nothing except the fall of Nanjing.

Tony says

NANJING REQUIEM. (2011). Ha Jin. ***.

The author is normally a writer whose prose resembles poetry. His sentences flow smoothly and precisely describe his characters, their surroundings and their actions. This book is no exception, but somehow it doesn't all come together the same way. This is the story of The Rape of Nanjing (Nanking) by the Chinese in 1937. The protagonist is Minnie Vantrien, an American missionary, the dean of Jinling Women's College. The school is for young women only and is well regarded throughout China. When the Japanese invade, Minnie decides to stay on at the school, thinking that the fact that she is an American will help protect the girls along with the men and women who work there. She decides – after the Japanese have taken over the city – to convert the school and its grounds into a safe haven – a safety zone or refugee camp – for young women and their mothers. The school under this plan could accommodate about 2,000 people. She soon finds herself providing shelter for over 10,000. She is constantly battling the incursion of Japanese troops, who see this safety zone as a concentrated source of young women. Along with this constant threat, she has to somehow deal with the administrative staff of Japanese who control the distribution of food and water throughout the city. In her travels from the school to the various administration buildings she sees and learns of the various atrocities committed by the Japanese soldiers. Thousands of people had been slaughtered and thousands of young women raped then killed by the lustful men of the army. All of these atrocities are described in sufficient detail to have them inscribed on the readers' minds. But, yet, the book reads more like the notes of a newspaper reporter. Somehow the usual spark of Ha Jin's writing was missing and I was left cold and, frustratingly, unfeeling at all of the despicable acts described. It was certainly a sad story, especially the tragic ending, but I felt like a reader twice removed.

Bill says

too boring...this reads like journalism, not a novel.
