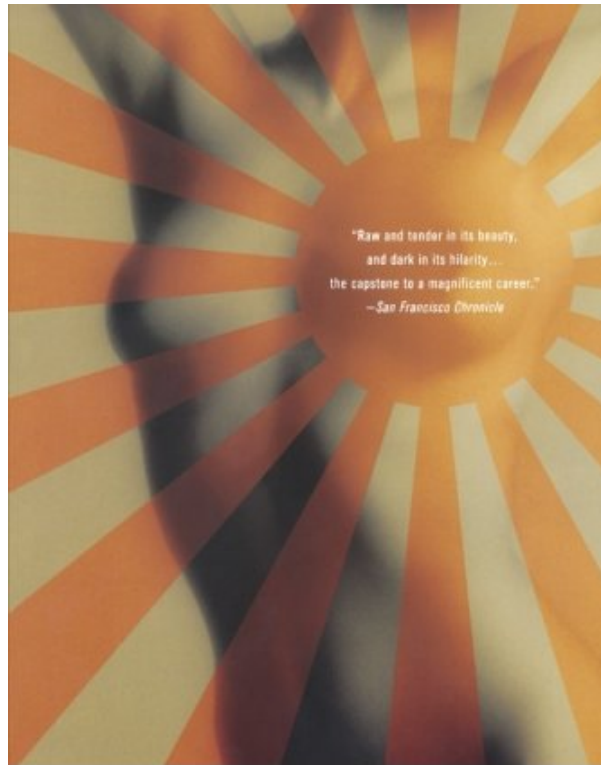


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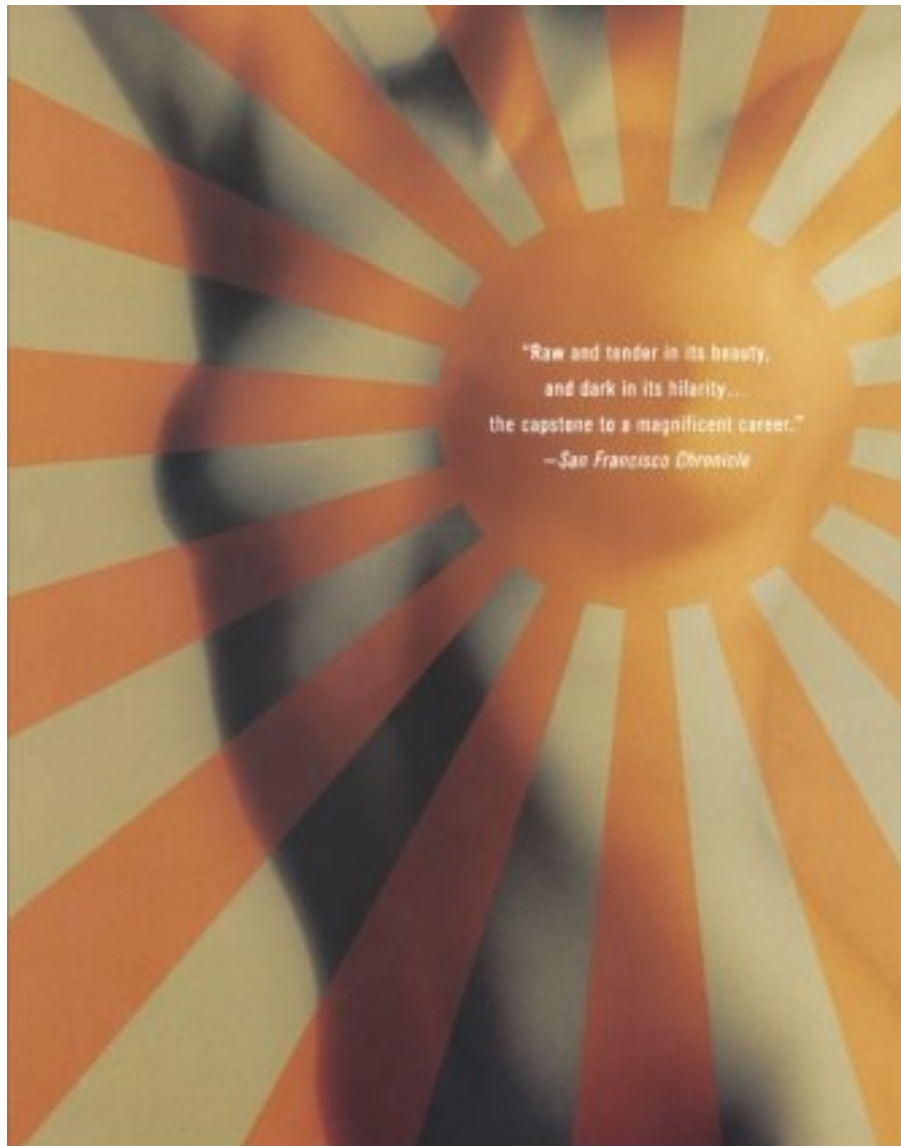


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From Publishers Weekly

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In this sequel to his award-winning *Empire of the Sun*, young James returns to England at the end of World War II. He stumbles through medical study at Cambridge, trains briefly as an RAF pilot in Canada, and marries. When his wife dies suddenly, Jim is thrust into the violence and sexual promiscuity of the sixties. Penetrating and wise, J. G. Ballard's biting social commentary and pushing of boundaries make this semi-autobiographical novel a small classic.

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JG Ballard - post-Shanghai

By Sheila H. McLaren

My expectations were very much off the mark after reading "Empire of the Sun" in which Jamie Ballard is a child - I forgot that JG Ballard had to grow up! And grow up he did - thoroughly traumatized by his years in Shanghai and in a Japanese camp for civilian internees. Jim Ballard was born in 1930, in the privileged British area of Shanghai where life seemed to be one long party. The British were accustomed to being "top dog" and living in luxury. In 1937 Japan invaded northern China, including Shanghai. Strangely, the British saw the atrocities as they took place, and seemed to view them as some kind of entertainment which could not ever affect them. The Japanese in Shanghai bided their time, showing extraordinary patience, and staying well clear of the International Settlement and the French Concession - until the day that their compatriots bombed Pearl Harbour in December 1941. This gave them permission to take possession of the International Settlement. They did it with a vengeance, and most foreign nationals were interned in a number of camps within 10 to 20 km of Shanghai. Young James Ballard and his friends lived a lifetime of experience in camp - this one called Lunghua. "Empire of the Sun" is about Lunghua. This book is about the aftermath. Only when the war had ended, and he and his mother were repatriated to England, did the trauma gradually catch up with him. For many years, he and friends sought only war, violence, death, drugs and sex. Although he married and had children, he remained haunted, with thoughts of Shanghai not ever far from his mind. Everything he did and thought during the 1960s and '70s seemed to be dictated by memories of Japanese atrocities, dead and dying Chinese, and the bomb dropped on Nagasaki: Wildly dangerous driving and drug-taking, an obsession with another, final nuclear war, and countless sexual encounters. The book, although not an "easy read", and with the sexual encounters perhaps sickening to many people, is beautifully written, and conveys subtly but thoroughly the effect that childhood trauma can have on later life. Ballard did eventually seem to find some peace within himself, probably anchored by the great love he had for his wife and children and by his tremendous capacity for writing. Although the violence of the tale is horrifying, this is a book well worth reading. It taught this reader a great deal - about history, about people, and - perhaps above all - about how appallingly difficult it is to understand cultures different from our own.

22 of 22 people found the following review helpful.

The biography as fiction

By Michael Battaglia

Empire of the Sun was one of the best examples of putting your life up to a critical analysis and staring unflinchingly at it . . . Ballard's portrayal of himself during World War II as a child has to rank as one of the more honest (even when it's not so flattering) attempts at a self-characterization that I can really only compare to Norman Mailer's *Armies of the Night*. Here he continues his own story, using the first person this time out and extending the narrative past World War II and nearly into his present. The beginning is a bit off for those who have read *Empire of the Sun* since some of the details gone over don't seem to coincide with the events we learned in the previous book but he manages to again evoke its' dreamlike qualities. From there it's mostly episodic and carried by Ballard's keen eye for events and gift for description, through his eyes the sixties and beyond become almost a shared hallucination, something that you wake up from and you're not sure if it really happened or not. There's no overarching narrative to the book, though his quest to overcome the wounds that were opened by his time in the internment camp is a running theme that partly gets resolved in the end, during the time of the making of the *Empire of the Sun* movie. Still, like real life there are jagged loose ends, lost characters and a graceful melancholy that holds everything together well. Perhaps the only complaint are the sex scenes, far from offensive, they seem almost cold and sterile, like Ballard was sitting there taking notes during the acts themselves, which could be the point for all I know. Because it covers so much more time it doesn't have the searing focus that the previous novel did, but the wide variety of events and times are engaging in their own right and just when you think Ballard has exhausted his ability to put a new spin on describing things, he pulls another effortless phrase out that can't help but stick in your head. A book you probably have to experience more than read, those coming out of *Empire of the Sun* wanting to see more will probably come away satisfied.

19 of 19 people found the following review helpful.

A starburst in your imagination.

By markbearn@aol.com

'The Kindness of Women' is one of the most extraordinary books I have ever read - it gripped me with the shock of seeing deep into a man's hurt but inspired psyche, it left me weeping in pity for Ballard and marvelling at his survival. And laughing out loud. The account of Ballard's life after Singapore, this is no ordinary narrative autobiography - rather, a series of chapters each of which might stand as a small masterpiece alone, each like the fragment of a smashed mirror reflecting a piece of Ballard's life in microcosm - his wife and her tragic death, his friends, his children (the chapter called 'Magic World' should open every 'anthology of happiness' ever published), his involvement with the 60s through his crashed car exhibition (out of which came *Crash*, the basis of Cronenburg's film) and his fascination with television. Women provide the linking thread through it all - the ones who Ballard loved, made love to, or in turn loved him - his wife, Miriam, most unforgettably. But the key is an account of a man coming to terms with himself and his violent childhood - in the end what one leaves this book with is a sense of the kindness of Ballard. For this beautiful, modest, deceptively simple book, shot through with images and symbols of suffering, pain, madness and death, is in the end, more than any of his other books, a celebration of life, of love, of friends and of people. Towards the end, Ballard remarks how it had taken him most of his life to realise how these simple things were what made him happy - the rest were just dross. For anyone who has ever questioned their life, or felt great pain in their heart or in their soul, or experienced suffering of any kind - this book offers the promise of redemption and catharsis. READ IT. It is a work for us all, a book of which one can truly say it has enriched the world. Thank you, James.

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