



Rose of Sarajevo

Ayşe Kulin, Kenneth Dakan (Translator)

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From the internationally bestselling author of *Last Train to Istanbul*.

Ever since Nimeta was a child, she'd done exactly what was expected of her. She married a responsible man she met in college, had two children, and established a busy journalism career—and there was no reason to think anything would ever change. Then one day, while reporting on a protest in Zagreb, Nimeta's life takes a dramatic turn. Not only does she lay eyes on a handsome reporter who captures her heart, but a little-known politician by the name of Slobodan Milosevic delivers a speech fanning the flames of long-dormant Serbian nationalism. As her love affair intensifies and political tensions build, Nimeta is forced to reconsider everything she thought she knew about family, love, loyalty, and humanity itself. Navigating both the new landscape of her heart and that of her beloved war-torn city, Nimeta must draw upon her deepest reserves of inner strength to keep her family safe. A moving drama set against the backdrop of the crisis that rocked the Balkans in the 1990s, *Rose of Sarajevo* reveals the tremendous lengths people will go to in the name of love.

Rose of Sarajevo Details

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From Reader Review Rose of Sarajevo for online ebook

Melinda says

Kulin provides a condensed history lesson of the Bosnian war which sets an affecting backdrop for the main protagonist and her family. The reader will be well versed in Balkans history, full of details matched with a plethora of political players to say the least.

With the backdrop in motion you become emotionally invested with Nimeta along with her family as they find themselves in the midst of unimaginable unrest as survival becomes paramount. The devastation of war, the horrific ethnic cleansing, bombing, the starving, rape and torture, the murdering are vividly depicted through the lens of numerous characters, quite compelling, disturbing.

Nimeta is a woman embroiled in an affair causing her distress as she finds herself ripped apart by her duty to husband and family or exiting to her lover's embrace for a life of happiness. Agonizing over her situation, her life In chaos, her turmoil is plausible and palpable, ringing true to the reader.

Kulin's writing style paired with dimensionality of characters never disappoints. Her ability to tap into the emotional and human side of protagonists always present.

Kulin crafts an incredible narrative with fascinating characters stirring the reader with a memorable reading journey. An important story encompassing life, love, friendship and family during a time of madness.

Ian says

This is a novel in two quite distinct parts. The first tries to set out a fairly detailed and often quite dry history of the implosion of Yugoslavia in the years following the death of Tito. The progression of events is often difficult to follow and the impact of the callous inhumanity of the notably Serbian politicians is diminished, as wrapped up within this recounting of history is a Danielle Steele style romance between two TV journalists, Nimeta a married Bosnian woman, the central character in the novel, and a Croatian man. No doubt this has been done to try to make the terrible facts more accessible, but the characterisation is distinctly shallow and this rather fluffy romance writing just felt all wrong given the horrors swirling around Nimeta. The blend of fact into fiction that is the art of great, readable historical fiction mostly fails but being fair it does improve somewhat in the second half when the fiction is more to the fore. So, as some other reviewers have noted, this book is a bit of a mess. There are a slew of much better novels set amid the carnage and cruelty of this war that are more worthwhile reading before this one. Try The Cellist of Sarajevo or As If I Am Not There as examples.

Cara says

This feels like the author's attempt to novelize the entire history of the Balkans from the mid-80s through around 1993. I mean, there are characters and everything, but they are flat and lifeless, and I felt absolutely nothing for them, even as they suffered injury/rape/murder and all that. It's really weird how a bad author can turn something that should affect me emotionally in a very strong way into something that affects me less

than reading about the events on Wikipedia. The whole thing felt very contrived and amateurish, and I was frankly surprised to read that the author has a rather good reputation as a writer, at least in Turkey. It feels very self-published to me, though that could be the translation. To give an example, the main character's son pipes in at odd moments asking his parents to explain the situation to him in terms he can understand, thus providing a very artificial way for the author to start talking about Bosnian history. It just feels very manipulated.

Good thing I only paid \$1.99 for this. I bought one of the author's other books, *Last Train to Istanbul: A Novel*, at the same time for the same price, and I'm willing to give it a try to see if it's any better.

Paakhi Srivastava says

Nemita is a journalist in Sarajevo embroiled in an affair causing her to feel torn between her duty towards her husband and family or exiting to her lover's embrace for a life of happiness. Amidst inner conflicts, she finds herself struggling through war as survival of her family becomes paramount.

Rose Of Sarajevo is one detailed, valiant, historical realism. Kulin's challenge has been to give a literary form to the horrors of Bosnian war, without resorting to despair or simple us-versus-them dichotomies. Kulin records war with precision and apparent objectivity through the life and lens of Nemita..the things that happen around and to her - practical and prosaic and always pragmatic about everything. The book disappointed me where most readers will appreciate it.. the utter lack of pathos and complexity that otherwise can be observed as the most significant force in the narration. Kulin states everything in a matter of fact way with contrived characters which often makes me to lose engagement with any book. Kulin's writing has dimensionality but her persistence with most elements is partial. Certain sections sounded like a desperation to be weighty and artsy, like a painting with all the strategic, careful brush strokes but missing something bigger. Some of my favorite books wade just as deep into the horror of human experience (*Farewell to Arms*) but with a complex beauty, too, which (in my humble, and clearly unpopular opinion) renders those works more authentic power and depth.

War always generates backlash - the honor and glory that war is supposed to provide is questioned in its aftermath. The blood-lust, the fever-pitch cries of honor and ideas of ethnic cleansing precede war and then simmer down into searching questions about what those terms mean or into scathing parodies. I am not entirely sure whether *Rose of Sarajevo* is a sober questioning of these virtues or a shambolic parody of them. Especially when Kulin combines Love with War, and both seem to get the same treatment, it becomes even harder to deduce whether Kulin is ridiculing war and its virtues or life and its delusions in general and including love also into it. My thoughts take strength as the ending doesn't leave us with much to pick up the pieces after.

My disappointment is with monotonous descriptions of the political frenzy which were detailed with much prowess (my knowledge of the Bosnian War before reading this book was laughably sparse but after a thorough reading of historical archives on the same, I found that Kulin's accounts match exactly with history). The book certainly captured Bosnian war and briskly touched upon human struggles during war but lacked spirit making it an ordinary read for me.

Sanda says

I kept putting off writing this review. Not because I did not like the book, far from it. It was primarily because the experience of reading this story, talking about it, is intensely emotional for me. I lived this war. Entire generations of citizens of ex-Yugoslavia have had their life path shaped by this war...I am no exception. And though I count myself "lucky" because I haven't lost as much as many...I "got to keep" the most important thing - my immediate family...at the same time the war steals something intangible from anyone it comes in contact with. For me that also meant that nowadays I avoid books and films about (any) war as much as possible. At the same time, most of us who got displaced (for me that meant calling Canada my new home) still carry in us a strong connection to our culture and that bond makes our heart skip a beat each time we recognize "traces of home" in anything. So when I got a copy of Rose of Sarajevo through Netgalley, it was one of those bittersweet moments - I knew I'd need a box of kleenex for reading it.

When I first moved to Canada, I experienced firsthand the difficulties and frustration of trying to explain the complexities of our war to anyone not familiar with the region. I definitely don't envy Ayse Kulin that task. I've gone through that process so many times that a couple of chapters into the book I realized that including maps would've helped that process considerably. A good portion of the book focuses on explaining the historical and political precursors to the war - something that will not be everyone's cup of tea (just a fair warning) but absolutely necessary for the rest of the story.

Nimeta's story will take you on a deeply emotional journey even if you have no connection to the region. She is a dedicated journalist. She is a mother, a wife, a daughter. She is a woman in love with someone she is not supposed to love. A battle between a sense of duty and desires of the heart set against the backdrop of war. I think Ayse Kulin did a great job in telling the story of a strong but fallible woman.

Coincidentally, I actually lived in Istanbul for a year, so I truly enjoyed the parts of the story related to Turkey and this gorgeous city. One thing that did bug me though was that Ayse Kulin kept using Turkish forms of speech and words in the passages that were actually taking place in Bosnia. So Nimeta's mother kept being referred to as Raziyan?m, a name which doesn't exist in the region, especially written in that form because Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian language does not contain letters "y" and "?" whereas Turkish language does. A local phyllodough dish called "burek" is referred to as "börek", once again a Turkish word. I know that these are minor details that most readers won't notice but to me it diminishes, however slightly, the authenticity of the book. (for those of you who didn't realize, the author of the book is actually Turkish)

I did cry. I cried quite a bit. It is practically impossible to stay emotionally detached while reading this story. The story does contain a few graphic parts but to exclude them would be a complete misrepresentation of the realities of war. And as brutal and disturbing as those parts of the story are they are just but a tiny part of the horrors that really did happen.

I really liked Ayse Kulin's writing style and I'd love to read Last train to Istanbul. She did an amazing job in terms of research about the history and politics of the region. I did feel that her point of view was ever so slightly biased (let's just say that her portrayal of the Bosnian president Izetbegovic as a naive and lost leader who got "tricked" by Tudjman and Milosevic is not exactly how I remember things or how many Bosnians from outside of Sarajevo would describe it). The thing is at the end of the day there is no such thing as an "unbiased retelling of the war." I just hope that this book will find its way to western readers and introduce them to this region that will always have a piece of my heart.

By the way "Sarajevo Rose" is an actual expression that was came into existence as a result of the war. It means " a concrete scar caused by a mortar shell's explosion that was later filled with red resin. Mortar rounds landing on concrete create a unique fragmentation pattern that looks almost floral in arrangement. Because Sarajevo was a site of intense urban warfare and suffered thousands of shell explosions during the Siege of Sarajevo, the marked concrete patterns are a unique feature to the city."

Sandy says

I received this ARC from netgalley.com. I found the book very compelling albeit a bit confusing in the beginning unless you know the configuration of old Yugoslavia. A map would have been a handy reference. Once I figured out the various republics, the book started making sense. At times it was difficult reading about the atrocities the Serbs committed on the Bosniaks. But all and all a compelling book about the Bosnia-Serb conflict

Andreea Ursu-Listeveanu says

This was my first encounter with the Balkans history, though I live very close to the region. I didn't know anything about the war in Bosnia and Rose of Sarajevo was a brutal "first date". I read so many books about WW2, about the wars in Iran and Afghanistan, but nothing about this one... and it shocked me. After all the Nazis and the Russians did, there still are things that shock me in every book about war. Rose of Sarajevo tells the story of Nimeta, a Bosniak journalist that falls in love with a Croatian workmate, while she's married with children. The book is not only about the drama of the war (which is very accurately depicted), but also about the drama of an unfaithful wife that struggles to keep her family together and chooses to rip her heart out by ending the affair with the one whom she loves deeply. To me, Nimeta is a monument of strength, she keeps finding resources to stand up again, even if she's broken so many times. I liked Ayse Kulin's style and I am interested in reading more of her books. Not to mention other books about this country's tormented history.

Leonie Drew says

Historical fiction providing explicit and personal detail of the Balkans crisis and the fragmentation of the Yugoslavia. Difficult to follow at times due to my poor knowledge of the shocking nature of the Serb-Bosnian war and the siege of Sarajevo. A woman's story set amongst the horror of what human beings can do to one an other.

Angela M says

In the introduction to this book, the author tells us that during the siege of Sarajevo, during the war in Bosnia, that "ten thousand six hundred Bosniaks – of whom 1,600 were children – lost their lives. "Yes, I knew about these horrible events, but I'm embarrassed to say that I didn't know more about the specifics. I

did a little research on my own and also discovered that during the Bosnian War, "Of a population of around four million in 1992, two million were made refugees. In the three and a half years of the conflict, more than 100,000 people were killed. " (Nick Hawton, History Today vol 59 issue 8, 2009) .These are horrific events, to say the least.

Ayse Kulin for the first part of the book, sets the political stage which was good for me since I was not fully aware of the specifics surrounding the history. I have to admit that for almost the first half of the book, I felt as if I was reading a non-fiction piece on the conflict. I also have to admit that I'm not much of a reader of non-fiction, so I almost gave this up. I am so glad that I didn't .

Kulin then brings the history to life through Nemeta and her family's story and it was a gripping. That's what good historical fiction has the capacity to do - give us a glimpse of what it might have been like. The descriptions of the siege of Sarajevo in some scenes were difficult to read, but so necessary to understand what happened here - the bombing, the starving, the raping, the torturing, the murdering .

The story is about this war, but it also is about a flawed woman, about friendships, about family and about love. I recommend this important story.

Thanks to AmazonCrossing and NetGalley.

Brenna Tkalcich says

I have been lucky enough to receive this title as a digital Advanced Reader Copy (ARC), and I have to say, both the author and translator deserve kudos for the almost-finished product I read.

The Yugoslavian Peninsula and its recent, bloody history are ingrained in the common consciousness of most people born pre-1990s. Between news coverage and diaries of teens and children who lived through it, in varying degrees of survivorhood, one cannot help but to have knowledge that something horrible happened, regardless of what deeper knowledge they have garnered.

"Rose of Sarajevo" attacked the war in a way I was not expecting. Here, we had not a child, nor a soldier, but a woman with a family, a personality, flaws, and a career -- not a job, but a career, which she uses at different points in the story for personal benefit and towards the end, to give her family a chance to survive. Nimeta, a Muslim Bosniak with ties to Sarajevo, Turkey, Zagreb and abroad, is a deeply flawed, deeply human woman who makes the effort to first cover up, then finally fix her mistakes and flaws.

Kulin's writing style made me feel that Nimeta and I were sharing the same hivemind; her attention to detail and to humanity was at times but touching and chilling, from how Nimeta's mother, Raziyanim, always made sure the children were fed contrasted with the fear she instilled in Nimeta that the children may have been eating pigeon meat to get their needed nourishment, to Nimeta's experience interviewing victims and survivors of the atrocities committed by the armed forces.

There are smaller subplots, including Nimeta's on-again, off-again lover, Stefan, a Croat whom she uses by the end of the story to help save her family. Her best friend - Raziyanim's nightmare - Mirsada, who escaped her own failing marriage when Nimeta stayed in hers for the children, who ran off with her own lover, who

created a non-Muslim identity that couldn't save her or her lover in the end. Burhan, Nimeta's first adoring, then loathing husband, who makes one enormous mistake and compounds it with another. All these people serve to contrast Nimeta's dangers with the greater dangers of the region and the fighting; the only issue I took with that was the way that very rarely, the reader seemed to be invited to pity Nimeta, while the horrors around her were much more distressing.

Ultimately, I think my favorite thing about this book was that, even as historical fiction, it was dead-on. Concise. It has been one of the shortest books I have read in the past six months, but it was meaty; Kulin does in a paragraph or two what many other authors need entire chapters to convey. Also, and without speaking to Kulin, one can only guess to whether it was intentional or not, Nimeta's personal flaws and growth seem to first foreshadow, then contrast to the downward spiral of the peninsula. All in all, I wish I could read more about whether or not Nimeta and her family survived, about what they continued to see. But I can't -- right now -- and yet it still seems alright with me.

Peggy says

I received this book in exchange for a review through netgalley.

I recently went on a trip to Croatia, Slovenia and Bosnia, and of course I knew about the Yugoslavian war before, but after this trip I got interested in learning more and wanted to read historical fiction set in this period. I was so excited to come across Rose of Sarajevo! The book gave me exactly what I wanted: I now know a lot more about the war than I did before.

The book had a bit of a slow start for me. The first half involves a lot of history and politics, and it's not a smoothless part of the story, so that at times it feels more like a history book. I had the impression that I didn't have enough foreknowledge to fully understand everything and I had a lot of questions while reading, so I ended up doing a lot of research on the internet. I also found the book confusing at times, I knew only one or two of the people from history (Milosevic and Mladic), and I had a hard time remembering whether a certain person was a Croat, Serb, or Bosniak, and whether they were a president, minister, rebel leader or something else, and what their goal in this war was. I did appreciate the step by step account of the events leading up to and happening during the war though, and it is a meticulously researched book. I agree with previous reviewers that a map or timeline would be useful. Although I got used to the history and fiction being distinct parts (it was like the history was given, followed by an account of what was going on in the personal lives of the characters at that point) after a few chapters, I didn't feel very involved with the main characters.

The second part of the book, however, I read in one go. There was much less of a history-book feel, a lot was happening in the lives of the fictional characters, and I felt more attached to them. The ending came a bit suddenly though, I didn't feel like the story was finished.

All in all, a wonderful book that will teach you lots about the Yugoslavian war, but it definitely needs some effort and investment from the reader's side.

Noel says

Ultimately, it didn't matter that the words leaving Miloševi?'s mouth were a fabrication. It only mattered that they were designed to inflame.

To help them achieve their goal, Serbian television broadcast a constant stream of propaganda alleging that the Serbs were under threat from the Albanians, that their lives were in danger,...

My knowledge of the conflict in Yugoslavia in the 1980s and 90s was fuzzy at best. This book set me straight, with a little help from wikipedia. But I do remember the 1984 winter Olympics. Joan Lunden, a reporter walked through Sarajevo marveling at the fact that so many different ethnicities and religions got along as one country. It was great reporting that didn't uncover the hidden sentiment hiding just below the surface.

In this novel, Kulin tells this story through a muslim journalist, wife, mother, daughter, lover - Nemita. It takes us through the naivté of the population to start, the astonishment of what might happen, and as history moved quickly, the brutal reality of living through Serbian's massacre. There are parts of the book that are hard to read, impossible to imagine without the frank description of the horrors of war. Intertwined with the war that surrounds her, Nemita - dutiful, responsible and in love with the wrong man, tries to keep a semblance of normalcy.

The lead up to the beginning of the destruction of Yugoslavia makes me think of some of what we are going through today. We never seem to learn.

Sureyya says

War, Love and Family...At the end of the 20th century, in the middle of Europe, genocide happened again. Love of human beings, perseverance was witnessed. Beautifully written.

Celia says

I loved Ayse Kulin's book the Last Train to Istanbul. Kulin is a writer who deserves to be better known in the US. She has the ability write a novel that gives the impression of being accurate historically and have interesting character development. I think it is very hard for historical fiction to be both accurate in its history and have its characters be interesting to its readers. Usually writers have to pick either good history or good faction. Also Kulin shows a picture of more moderate(Turkish) Muslim world.

For example the Rose of Sarajevo shows Muslim women who have careers as journalists. Not only are these

Muslim women journalists but they travel by themselves, drink alcohol, smoke and have affairs with Christian men. These women have either considered leaving or have left their Muslim husbands. The men who threaten these women's lives aren't Muslim but the Serbs who are Orthodox Christians.

The first half of the novel is somewhat confusing as it goes into the history of the break-up of Yugoslavia. The different ethnic groups are hard to keep track of. I think the book would have benefited by an introduction that gives more of the history of Yugoslavia and the different ethnic groups that formed that country.

However, by the second half of the novel, I realized that the Serbs were Orthodox Christians that seemed bent on a Nazi-like expansion of incorporating all areas where the Serbians lived (even if they were the ethnic minority in that location) into the new country of Serbia. The Serbians are out to destroy the Bosnians. The Bosnians are Muslims. The Muslims are in this area of Europe because of the Ottoman Empire. Some are descendants of the Turks and some are descendants of the indigenous people of the area who converted to Muslim religion when the Turks occupied the area. Another ethnic group in the area is the Croatians who are Catholic and unlike the Serbians are not genocidal to the Bosnians.

The second half of the book is good but sad as it tries to show a Bosnian family trying to survive a Serbian siege of the city. The people are real and have their human problems.

The Rose of Sarajevo is a good book to read if one doesn't mind a sad subject and can make it through a somewhat confusing first half of the book.

Sarah says

I received this book through NetGalley in exchange for an honest review.

I visited Croatia over the Summer and was struck by how little I knew of the war that occurred in the region back in the 90s. I wanted to know more about it but wanted to learn from fiction because it's much more enjoyable. And then I saw that this book was due to be released this month and I was able to get a copy through NetGalley which I was really excited about.

Mission Accomplished! This author had meticulously researched the Yugoslavian war and about the history of these cultures as a whole. I learnt so much from this book. In the first half of the book, there was a lot of politics and history which was very interesting and informative, however, I felt that the author didn't seem to have been able to weave it in to the story seamlessly - it seemed a little forced and clunky. I felt like the author wasn't sure what she was going for with the book - a novel or a history book. This dynamic did change as the book progressed though and the last half of the book was more focused on the fictional characters which I really liked.

Some of the history was a little confusing and it is almost assumed by the author that we should know who all the political figures are. I did a lot of searching the internet for confirmation, more background information, and maps of the region. I think the book would have benefited from maps and maybe a list of political figures, their positions, and which country they represented.

At the beginning, I didn't feel invested in the characters because I knew so little about them and the history was focused on more than the characters were. The history was very detailed but nothing else was really described that much - the characters, their houses, their place of work, the town they live in, etc. So while I

had a really good grasp on the history and the culture of the region, I didn't get a feel for the individual countries or Sarajevo where the book was mostly set.

Some sections were hard to read, those which detailed the atrocities that occurred there but they were not described in minute details so it's not overly gruesome. This is quite a short book but the author packs in a lot of information and story. I thought the book ended a little abruptly.

All in all, I thoroughly enjoyed reading the book and the things that it brought up for me to think about. It was very thought provoking and it was good to read this with another person so we could discuss what happened and our thoughts.
