

once the Italians are not stereotyped as cowards or incompetents. Really though, if you wanted an exciting and tense story about Alamein, you would be better off with a good non-fiction book.

*Martin Bourne*

### THE IMPROPER LIFE OF BEZELLIA GROVE

Susan Gregg Gilmore, Shaye Areheart, 2010, \$23.00, hb, 256pp, 9780307395030

The first daughter of every generation of Grove women is named Bezellia, after the family's courageous and iconoclastic matriarch, and teenage Bezellia Grove has grown up amid the stifling pressure of family names and expectations. The Groves are one of Nashville's finest families, and like many fine families, they hide their secrets well. Bezellia's mother's dreams of being a grande dame of society are derailed by her alcoholism, and Bezellia's father is a doctor who is frequently absent. Bezellia's main caretakers are the family's housekeeper, Maizelle, and their handyman, Nathaniel. When Bezellia meets Nathaniel's teenage son, Samuel, she is instantly attracted to him, though their relationship goes against everything that both teens have been raised to believe. Bezellia finally finds her match in quick-witted, ambitious Samuel. When both families begin to suspect the relationship, Bezellia is sent to spend the summer with her grandparents, where she has a rebound relationship with another unlikely young man—this one, a country boy from the wrong side of the tracks.

Gilmore captures the spirit of 1960s Nashville, a place where the status quo is challenged by

the burgeoning civil rights movement. She also describes the tense relationship between the African-American servants employed by many Southern families and the families who employ them. Looking back, we know that the South was changing, and we know that this change, built as it was on centuries of oppression and inequality, was both hard-won and resented by many. Bezellia seems to be an emblem of this New South, a young woman willing to speak up and fight against oppression and inequality. Though Gilmore is occasionally a bit heavy-handed in nailing this point home, Bezellia's story is engaging, and you'll find yourself wanting her to change the world for the better.

*Nanette Donohue*

### THE FROZEN HEART

Almudena Grandes (trans. Frank Wynne), Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 2010, 774pp, £16.99, hb, 9780297844884

Grandes is a much respected and prize-winning author in her native Spain, which leads me to question whether that excellent country's literature exports as successfully as its cooking. Though the subject matter of *The Frozen Heart* is rich territory for the novelist, a saga which embraces both the Spanish Civil War and dark doings on the Eastern Front in the Second World War, the potential power of the narrative is utterly submerged in a welter of over-writing and a baggy structure involving layers of backstory which are both complex and inadequately signposted to the reader.

The novel sets out not merely to entertain but also to fulfil a serious and necessary task in

contributing to Spain's collective examination of the Civil War which defined its character for most of the 20th century. It follows the history of two families backwards from the death of the wealthy and puissant paterfamilias and pillar of Madrid society, Julio Carrion Gonzalez. Gonzalez' son, Alvaro, is inspired to begin to investigate the family history by the arrival at his father's funeral of the mysterious Raquel Fernandez Perea, daughter of Civil War exiles. The enormous cast of characters is inadequately differentiated. I was forever referring back to earlier chapters to refresh my memory as to the roles and identities of different characters, which further hindered my progress through a loose and slow-moving plot.

On the plus side, this is a clever story with intriguing secrets at its heart, and more patient readers than me will find many things to admire about it. I should also observe that there may be inadequacies in the translation. And, of course, the nation which gave us *Don Quixote* clearly has a greater taste for very long and thinly-plotted novels than we do, but Grandes falls far short of Cervantes' genius.

*Sarah Bower*

### WHEN WINTER RETURNS

Kathryn Miller Haines, HarperCollins, 2010, \$14.99, pb, 333pp, 9780061579578

When I first began reading *When Winter Returns*, I didn't realize it was the fourth in a series, but by the time I was 50 pages in, I had already ordered the first three because I was enjoying myself so much. While I wish I had read them in order, my enjoyment wasn't diminished in the slightest since the author did such a superb job of pulling me into this mystery set in 1943 NYC. This is one fun book that has definitely hooked me on the entire series!

*When Winter Returns* follows budding actress Rosie Winter as she comes home from a USO tour with her best friend, Jayne. The first stop the ladies make is to visit the parents of Jayne's fiancé, who was killed in the South Pacific. While there, however, Rosie makes the startling discovery that Jayne's fiancé had lied to them by stealing the identity of another soldier who had died earlier in the war. This discovery is only the beginning of the mysteries surrounding Billy DeMille, and while Jayne is inclined to let things go, Rosie is determined to get to the truth. Meanwhile, the girls also find themselves blackballed from the theater by a member of the mob and hiding a male friend in their all-girl boarding house; when another murder occurs, the girls realize they are in grave danger from more than one quarter.

Full of '40s flavor and ambience, *When Winter Returns* is just a delight from start to finish. While the mystery itself isn't too complicated, the story is fleshed out by the appearance of Rosie's ex-boyfriend and relationships among the women of the boarding house. The characters literally jump off the page and capture you from the very start. I cannot wait to read more of this series! Great fun.

*Tamela McCann*

### THE CHILDREN OF MOTHER GLORY

C. M. Harris, Spinsters Ink, 2009, \$14.95, pb, 240pp, 9780307272669

It's 1909 in Kentucky, and the Reverend

### ✿ A SUMMER WITHOUT DAWN

Agop J. Hacikyan and Jean-Yves Soucy, Interlink, 2010, \$20.00, pb, 545pp, 978156656809 / Saqi, 2000, £17.95, 545pp, 9780863565380



### EDITORS' CHOICE

This is the compelling story of a family caught up in the deportation and extermination of Armenians during the Great War. In the summer of 1915, Vartan Balian, a former writer for the current government's opposition, is a target for execution. In prison, with his whereabouts unknown, his family is forced to join the Armenian population of Sivas, a small town in Turkey, on a forced march. With only the belongings that could fit into an oxcart, the Armenians are forced to travel to their new home, where they are told that they will live separate from the Turk population. Many Armenians will die or will be sold into slavery on this march. After escaping from his prison, Vartan travels throughout the country for three years in search of his wife, Maro, and their son, Tomas.

This is a remarkable, unforgettable novel of survival based upon the true story of the ethnic cleansing by the Turkish government during the First World War. The novel is well-written with fascinating and memorable characters, both Turks and Armenians, who are caught

up in the government's extermination of millions of people. Translated into English from French, this novel was first published in 1991. I highly recommend this book to all who wish to learn more about this tragedy, an event in world history that still is not recognized by the present Turkish government as having actually occurred.

*Jeff Westerhoff*