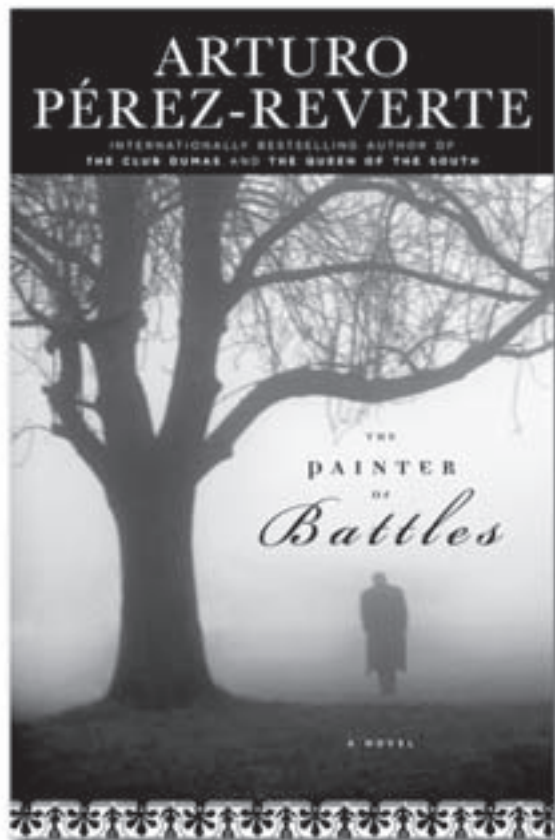


From the internationally bestselling author of *The Flanders Panel* and *The Club Dumas*

# “Ravishing...

a novel of such visual power that we can almost smell the sea and feel the soggy sand underfoot.... This is a book about war and the meaning of war. It's a subject that Pérez-Reverte, a war correspondent for more than 20 years, knows intimately, and the details of this brilliant little novel are spellbinding.... and the ending is perfect.”

—Margaret Cannon, *The Globe and Mail*



RANDOM HOUSE

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## JIHAD » FROM D3



Children play in the rubble around a soccer field in the Ayn al-Hilwah Palestinian refugee camp of southern Lebanon: 'We hate the United States government and we hate Israel, but the Jewish and the American people have done nothing to us.' JARED COHEN/GOTHAM

their critique as the byproduct of ideological indoctrination rather than the outcome of lived experience. There is lots of empathy for Iraqi Kurds and their quest for independence and freedom, but relatively little when it comes to similar aspirations among Lebanese Shia and Palestinians. What this suggests is that this book is both a study of Middle Eastern youth and a subtle exposé on the biases and limits of a young American's understanding of the politics of the Muslim world.

None of this is to take away, however, from the moral seriousness that Cohen brings to his inquiry. His intentions are noble, his courage is beyond dispute and his attempt to bridge the Islam-West divide by simply listen-

ing to "the other" is to be applauded. While Cohen is cautiously optimistic about the future potential of young people in the Middle East, the same observation can be applied to his generation of recent American university graduates, especially those with an elite education.

To the extent that Jared Cohen is representative of young people his age in the West, especially those with strong moral and emotional ties to the region, there is similar room for optimism that perhaps the "Clash of Civilizations" can be eventually transcended by a dialogue of civilizations.

» Nader Hashemi is a visiting assistant professor at the UCLA International Institute in Los Angeles, Calif.

## FIRST FICTION

# So help us, Hannah

### BE GOOD

By Stacey May Fowles  
Tightrope, 183 pages, \$18.95

REVIEWED BY JIM BARTLEY

Hannah is dejected in soggy Vancouver. Morgan is giddy somewhere between Paris and Madrid. Boys and impulse have pulled apart these twentysomething girlfriends. Meanwhile, love hangs in the air between.

Hannah is forthright about Morgan: "She can't say I love you. ... I would have done anything to hear those words come out of her overly painted red mouth."

But what presents as an incipient lesbian romance quickly morphs into a broader exploration of diffuse longings and fragile identities.

Toronto writer Stacey May Fowles is cruising a scarred landscape between the poles of gay and straight. Refreshingly, she never labours over which pole Hannah or Morgan might favour. *Be Good* is about twentysomethings stranded among our multiple definitions of what love is, between aimless wants and serial not-havings.

Morgan, a self-defined "firecracker," has accepted that she's "the type of girl men cheat on their girlfriends and wives with." She says, "The itch of bliss [is] the marker that starts the path toward pain." Her prescription: Avoid all but the most fleeting flings. "I am going through the filthiest of motions and I am enjoying them, pure and simple."

The phrase "Daddy's dirty girl" haunts her. She fends off memories of being hit, called ugly, dragged by the hair. Sometimes she asked to be hit. The details remain unknown.

Hannah was smitten from the get-go. "When I first met Morgan in the dead of yet another Montreal winter, I thought she was the most beautiful living creature I had ever seen." She was "all overdone pale moody cool and pouty dark-eyed disinterest." The lack of interest was what finally drove Hannah to Vancouver, to become a martyr to the manipulative Finnegan.

Character names (six in all) launch short chapters, each a snippet of candid, first-person narrative alternating with occasional third-person forays into the same characters, though Fowles's outside voice

hardly gives an observational advantage. The characters' unforbearing analyses of themselves and others can read like ruthless omniscience.

It makes for voices that feel bracingly honest, fresh and jaded in the same breath — until Morgan's voice announces: "Hannah's a liar." Despite her art-school background, Hannah is essentially "a writer, and by default, she has no real sense of truth."

A few pages later, bracketed third-person commentaries begin contradicting Morgan's self-reportage. "She can't reveal vulnerability." What has seemed show-off candour is really a quagmire of deception, self- and otherwise.

Templeton, a divorced husband on the rebound, becomes Morgan's weekend lover, learning from her deceptions and violent appetites that "we are all animals. We tell lies because we are hungry and want only to eat."

When Hannah describes the protective devotion she felt for Morgan as she comforted her after a miscarriage, it feels like the first authentic meeting of hearts in the book. Then we're told that Morgan later confessed to faking the pregnancy and the loss. By this point, every claim begins to seem unreliable; admissions, lies, confessions to lies, none of it can be trusted.

Is the narrative journey the fraud, or only the figures that people it? Should we care what's real with these imaginary lost souls? Fowles forces these questions. Late in the story, in the context of Hannah confessing to faking her orgasms, we read, "Liars and writers. The two are interchangeable."

It feels like a barrier thrown up, as if there's now no doubt that our despairing (faux-despairing?) author is intent on blocking whatever measure of authenticity her work might generate, blocking the very things that we expect from a novel.

We know that fiction is a fraud, yet we can thrill to the real things that novels bring to bloom within our suspended disbelief. This book shudders to a complex, moving, thought-provoking climax, then undermines it in the last pages. I wish the author had stifled that final impulse.

» Jim Bartley is *The Globe and Mail's* first-fiction reviewer.