Clarion Review

Historical

Shadow of the Green Cross
Ann Marcia Shaftel
978-1-4536-1955-1
Four Stars (out of Five)

Fear and suspicion were the norm in sixteenth-century Spain and Portugal, a time when Christianity was the only recognized religion. To step outside the laws of the church was to invite the heavy hand of the Inquisition, and any accusation could cost a life. This is the backdrop against which Ann Marcia Shaftel has set her compelling debut novel, *Shadow of the Green Cross*.

Isabel Alvares is a beautiful and strong-willed Jew whose family was forcibly baptized when she was four years old. Outwardly they live as Christians, but they continue to practice their Judaism in secret. Pedro da Cuelho is a devout Christian. When he was fourteen he participated in the forced baptisms, including Isabel's. Her innocence and her terror helped him to realize that what he did was wrong.

When Isabel and Pedro meet again ten years later they fall in love. Not surprisingly, Pedro's family will not accept Isabel because she is a new Christian and Isabel's family will not accept Pedro because he is a Gentile. Their love, however, is stronger than the forces that keep them apart and the two of them will eventually help create a world that is more tolerant for people of both faiths.

This book is beautifully written. It is well paced from beginning to end with fully realized characters and a story that examines the best and worst of human nature. It is an epic story spanning decades and continents and the reader will have no trouble imagining the cruel circumstances of the era. Unfortunately, the book has one major flaw: the history is not always accurate. For instance, Shaftel writes of Isabel's need to learn to use a knife for self defense: "…the knife Isaac had given her flashed before her eyes. Her hands remembered the weight and shape of it as her fingers curled around her scrub-brush. Isaac's words, too, came back to her now. *There are some places that bleed more than others. You have books of anatomy…* She set the brush down and picked up a page of Maimonides's text, to read again about the circulation

of blood." Maimonides was a twelfth-century philosopher who never wrote about circulation. William Harvey first proposed that blood circulated in the body in 1628, decades after the period in which this book was set and centuries after Maimonides lived and wrote. Though this may seem like a minor detail, the importance of historical accuracy to readers of this genre cannot be understated. If the reader recognizes historical errors, the believability of the entire story is lost.

Ultimately, this is a very fine book. Some chapters in history are too tragic to be redeemable and this book certainly reflects the tragedy of the Spanish Inquisition. The story is full of sorrow from beginning to end, but it is also much more than a tragedy. *Shadow of the Green Cross* is a story of courage, strength and the power of love.

Catherine Thureson