



## The American Girl

*Monika Fagerholm*

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In 1969, a young girl makes a trip from Coney Island to the swampy coastland on the rural outskirts of Helsinki, Finland. There, her death will immediately become part of local mythology, furnishing boys and girls with fodder for endless romantic imaginings. Everyone who lives near the swamp dreams about Eddie de Wire, the lost American girl. . . . For both Sandra and Doris, two lonely, dreaming girls abandoned in different ways by their parents, this myth will propel them into their coming-of-age through mischievous role-playing games of love and death, in search of hidden secrets, the mysteries of the swamp, and the truth behind Eddie's death. The girls construct their own world, their own language, and their own rules. But playing adult games has adult consequences, and what begins as two girls just striking matches leads to an inferno that threatens to consume them and tear their friendship apart.

Crime mystery and gothic saga, social study and chronicle of the late sixties and early seventies, a portrait of the psyche of young girls on the cusp of sexual awakening, *The American Girl* is a bewitching glimpse of the human capacity for survival and for self-inflicted wounds. Fagerholm is a modern-day heir to the William Faulkner heritage of family tragedy, with a highly musical and literary prose style that is rich with wit and literary allusions. *The American Girl* will teach you the meaning of trust as you give yourself entirely to the original storytelling style of Monika Fagerholm.

## The American Girl Details

Date : Published February 16th 2010 by Other Press (first published 2004)

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Author : Monika Fagerholm

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## From Reader Review The American Girl for online ebook

### Okidoki says

Konstig och fascinerande.

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### Sam says

The review I read of this was very different from the book I actually encountered. The review led me to believe it was a mystery, when in fact it seemed to be a mess of magical realism with the foreboding of lesbian suicide. It was too annoying to finish.

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### Ami Stearns says

It looks like many people on goodreads didn't like this book- I absolutely LOVED it but only after I'd pushed through to about page 100. At that point, I was completely entranced- I love her writing style, it really spoke to me. Yes, it is very confusing in places, and the ending still leaves me with questions- I honestly don't know what actually happened.

The things others have pointed out- unique writing style, repetition, dark and moody- are the things I really loved.

That being said, what I love are words, not plots. This book is beautifully written.

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### Ali Lafferty says

500 pages of nothing important. You would think there would be SOMETHING that I liked about this, seeing how I finished it and it's about a murder. But yeah. Maybe the translation wasn't good? I can tell this author's writing style was maybe supposed to be really poetic, tons of metaphors and stuff, but I don't think it came across right in English. There were a couple scenes that were really beautiful though, and these scenes, few and far between, might be the only reason I read this much about two girls growing up in a world that seemingly never changes. It was extremely hard for me to keep characters and relationships straight at first, and I also had trouble telling the time passing between key events (and by key events I mean characters' deaths. I don't feel like this is a hard-hitting spoiler in any way because the deaths almost seem unimportant to the story). There was some sort of resolution, but it didn't feel satisfying, maybe because I didn't experience a real sense of build-up to get there. I didn't feel like any resolution was completely deserved.

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### Christine Rebbert says

This might well be the absolutely worst book I have ever attempted to read -- I could only make it through

about the first hundred pages, and I had no idea whatsoever what was happening in the story. Except that the Finnish author had presumably never actually met an American girl, because she gives them weird names like Eddie and Kenny... Things go back and forth in time; maybe it's artistic and all that, but I just didn't get it. Into the pile for donation to Goodwill it goes; life's too short and all that...

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### **Brittany says**

It isn't very often you encounter a book with dedications and acknowledgments from a translator. Perhaps on some classical works when Ovid or Virgil didn't opt to thank their publicists, you get a fill-the-space dedication from a contemporary scholar. But really, the emphasis on translator should have been the first sign. The translator thanking the author for answering her questions should have been the second.

Not to say that *The American Girl* was a bad book. There was certainly no lack of story and a dynamic style in the telling. ~~It was just impossible to follow.~~ It was just so translated. I can't help but feel I'm missing out on something.

In a linear storytelling, it would have taken the space of a short story. With the jump arounds, backtracks, revisiting, and flat-out repetition, the book clocked in at nearly 500 pages. I'm not shy of large-scale novels. I'm not afraid of creative literary structure. I am wary of manuscripts that could have benefited from some cuts. Tailored a bit this could have been a very intriguing story. I'd even venture to say that a screen adaptation would be wickedly popular. Cutting this down to screenplay size would certainly allow the reader/viewer to stick with the story and cut down on the overwhelming number of circles it travels in. Ultimately, I'll chalk it up to lost in translation - a solid story hidden in some confusing text

*Disclosure: The above book was provided to me by Other Press through the Goodreads First Reads program. The opinions are all my own.*

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### **Nina says**

A few reviews on the back of the book said this novel was "light, playful...a delightful experience". But instead I thought this was a very dark, moody, and heavy coming of age tale. It takes place outside of Helsinki in the early 70's. It was a difficult read because of the style of writing (and perhaps the translation?), but once I got into it (after about 250 pages of the 500) I was engaged by the characters. It had mystical tones, as well as a murder mystery plot line, but it was a lot of pages about the emotions around dysfunctional relationships, sexual tension while coming of age, and teenage angst at its saddest and most tragic level.

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### **Rebecka says**

There's something rather unfortunate about this book, but I'm not sure how it could have been fixed. Most likely, if you tell yourself "I'll give it 100 pages", you'll never finish it. I found it quite dull until page **277!** But I kept on reading, and you do have to be very patient to appreciate this book. There is a possibility the weirdness of it all will put you off rather quickly, but if not, you get used to it, and it just becomes part of this strange story after a while. Since I am becoming more and more disillusioned with modern Swedish prose (stiff, trying to be classy but just coming across as preposterous, etc.) this was very refreshing. Fagerholm actually uses words that any author should be careful with, and stiff sentence structure, but she makes it all

work! I had no idea the author was Finno-Swedish, which would of course make her Swedish somewhat different for me, until the very end of the book. Up until that point, I thought she was just writing in a quirky way! However, I read in an interview with her that she "writes in her own language", and not in Finno-Swedish, and has been criticized in Finland for writing poor Finno-Swedish, so... my point that she is creative in her language use then stands! ;) (But does this count as Scandinavian lit if is strictly speaking Finnish?)

The entire book is highly repetitive, yes, but that also adds something to the story. The mantra of the American girl keeps repeating and repeating, until you start ignoring it, and then things abruptly change. The swamp, the weird house, the dialect, the mindset, everything ends up coming together very nicely, if you just persevere and don't stop reading. I've seen many English reviews commenting on the writing, and that's understandable. How do you translate weirdness? It must be extremely difficult. I also saw someone commenting on it being difficult to follow the story line, but I don't agree with that. It's hard to know what will end up being the true story, though, because that keep changing over and over.

Despite the slowness, this gets 4 stars, because Doris is an amazing character and I just love that she gets to keep some of her mystery. I would have loved to have an entire book about Rita as well, or about Inget. Seriously, everyone in this book has a life that merits a book.

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## Το ?σχημο P?ζι Καρολ?να says

Η ?ντυ ντε Γου?ιρ, η ηρω?δα που ?δωσε το ?νομ? της στον τ?τλο αυτο? του βιβλ?ου, δεν αποτελε? κεντρικ? χαρακτ?ρα του ?ργου. Η ζω? και κυρ?ως το μυστ?ριο γ?ρω απ? τον θ?νατ? της αποτελο?ν απλ? την αφορμ? για να ξετυλιχθε? η ιστορ?α. Σε μια αν?νυμη «Περιοχ?» της Φινλανδ?ας, ?που υπ?ρχουν δ?ο ακρωτ?ρια, ?να μεγ?λο δ?σος και οι β?λτοι. Εκε? αν?μεσα σε πολλ? εξοχικ? σπ?τια, δ?πλα στη θ?λασσα που κατοικ?νται κυρ?ως τους καλοκαιρινο?ς μ?νες απ? ξ?νους, υπ?ρχουν και οι ντ?πιοι που μιλ?νε την δικ? τους δι?λεκτο και ζουν τις δικ?ς τους ζω?ς, τις καταπιεσμ?νες και εκτεθειμ?νες ζω?ς των ανθρ?πων της επαρχ?ας. Και κυρ?ως υπ?ρχουν κ?ποια παιδι?, που προσπαθο?ν να μεγαλ?σουν, μ?σα σε ?να περιβ?λλον που συχν?, θα μπορο?σε να χαρακτηριστε? και εχθρικ?, μ?σα στον αλκοολισμ?, στην καταθλιπτικ? μελαγχολ?α του ατ?λειωτου χειμ?να, την ψυχολογικ? αστ?θεια των ενηλ?κων που αποδεκν?ονται συχν? κατ?τεροι των περιστ?σεων, μ?σα σε ?ναν λαβ?ρινθο απ? παρατεταμ?νες σιωπ?ς, μισ?λογα, μυστικ? και ψ?ματα.

Το βιβλ?ο αυτ?, ε?ναι ?να αλλ?κοτο bildungsroman που εξελ?σσεται με μια ιδια?τερη συγγραφικ? τεχνικ?. Η συγγραφ?ας, η σουηδ?φωνη Monika Fagerholm χρησιμοποιε? κ?ποια επαναλαμβαν?μενα μοτ?βα, ως επωδο?ς. Το ?διο θ?μα εξελ?σσεται μ?σα απ? μη ομ?κεντρους τεμν?μενους κ?κλους, γεγον?ς που με ευχαριστε? ιδια?τερα, γιατ? ?τσι αντιλαμβ?νομαι προσωπικ? την ?ννοια τ?σο του ιστορικο? ?σο και του λογοτεχνικο? χρ?νου. Πολ? συχν? προαναγγ?λλει ?να γεγον?ς, που χ?νεται μ?σα στις υπ?λοιπες λεπτομ?ρειες για να αναδυθε? ?πειτα με εξαιρετικ? σφοδρ?τητα, την κατ?λληλη στιγμ?, ?τσι ?στε να δημιουργ?σει ισχυρ? συναισθ?ματα στον αναγν?στη. Και η αν?γνωση αυτο? του ?ργου απαιτε? σ?γουρα χρ?νο, και υπομον?. Για κ?ποιο λ?γο μου θ?μισε την αμιγ?ς φινλανδικ? φιλοσοφ?α του λεγ?μενου «suomalainen sisu». Να μην τα παρατ?ς μπροστ? στις δυσκολ?ες. Και το κε?μενο της Fagerholm ε?ναι δ?σκολο. Ο τρ?πος που αναπτ?σσει το υλικ? της ε?ναι εξαντλητικ?ς. Και η γλ?σσα της, ακ?μα και στην αγγλικ? μετ?φραση απ? την οπο?α την δι?βασα ε?ναι ιδι?τυπη. Χρει?ζεται υπομον? και επιμον? για να καταφ?ρει κ?ποιος να φτ?σσει στο τ?λος.

Κ?ποια απ? τα επαναλαμβαν?μενα μοτ?βα ε?νατ:

- Το ρ?δο, ως μυστηριακ? απεικ?νιση των θηλυκ?ν γεννητικ?ν οργ?νων.
- Το κακ? μ?τι, ως συμβολισμ?ς μιας αδι?κοπης παρακολο?θησης η α?σθηση πως ακ?μα και στην πιο μεγ?λη ερημη?, υπ?ρχουν π?ντα μ?ρτυρες που βλ?πουν και γνωρ?ζουν τα π?ντα.
- Το τρ?πτυχο ?γκλημα –τιμωρ?α – εξιλ?ωση.
- Η καθαρι?τητα, ως υποκατ?στατο της ψυχικ?ς κ?θαρσης.
- Η πορνε?α, ως τρ?πος ?παρξης και μ?σο μιας σεξουαλικ?ς αφ?πνισης – απελευθ?ρωσης απ? τους καταπιεστικ?ς κοινωνικ?ς και ηθικο?ς καν?νες.
- Ο αλκοολισμ?ς ως δι?ξοδος στις αντιξ?τητες της ζω?ς.
- Η κηδεμον?α, ως τρ?πος επιβολ?ς.
- Οι χ?ρτες, ως συμβολικ?ς τρ?πος απεικ?νισης των μυστικ?ν που κρ?βει κ?θε κλειστ? κοινων?α.
- Το παιχν?δι, ως μ?σο τελετουργικ?ς αναπαρ?στασης γεγον?των και καταστ?σεων.
- Η μουσικ?, ως κουλτο?ρα αλλ? και ως μ?σο προσωπικ?ς ?κφρασης.
- Τα αδ?ρφια, ως αντιθετικ? αλλ?λοσυμπληρων?μενοι αλλ? και αλληλοσυγκρουν?μενοι π?λοι, που η ?παρξη του εν?ς προ?ποθ?τει την ?παρξη του ?λλου.
- Η μητρ?τητα ως ευλογ?α αλλ? και ως κατ?ρα.
- Η φυγ?, ως μ?σο σωτηρ?ας.
- Ο κ?πος, ως ?νας απαγορευμ?νος παρ?δεισος.

Δ?ο κεντρικ?ς φιλοσοφ?ες διατυπ?νονται και συγκρο?ονται μ?σα στο ?ργο. Η μ?α, διατυπωμ?νη απ? την ?νγκετ, την αδερφ? της ?ντυ:

«Π?ς π?ει εκε?νο το πο?ημα του Nils Ferlin; "Σκ?ψου τ?ρα, προτο? να σε σπρ?ξουμε μακρι?, ξυπ?λυτο παιδ?, στη ζω?". Η ?νγκετ ?ναψε ?να τσιγ?ρο και συν?χισε: Η ουσ?α αυτο? του ποι?ματος κατ? την γν?μη μου ε?ναι πως σου δ?νεται ?νας ορισμ?νος αριθμ?ς απ? ευκαιρ?ες και δυνατ?τητες, αλλ? χι απερι?ριστες. Αν δεν αξιοποι?σεις τις ευκαιρ?ες σου δεν θα υπ?ρξει κ?ποιος που να ?ρθει και να σου δ?σει καινο?ργιες. Και επιπλ?ον. Τελικ? λοι μας ε?μαστε μ?νοι. Καν?νας δεν μας δ?νει τ?ποτα. Πρ?πει να ε?μαστε προετοιμασμ?νοι γ? αυτ?. Αυτ? ακριβ?ς το πρ?γμα ε?ναι η ενηλικ?ωση. Μια γαμημ?νη τερ?στια μοναξ?».»

Η ?λλη ε?ναι διατυπωμ?νη απ? την γιαγ? της ?ντυ:

«Αυτ?, κορ?τσια, ε?πε, ε?ναι απ? τον Π?κο ντε λα Μιρ?ντολα: "Σας τοποθ?τησα στο κ?ντρο της δημιουργ?ας, ?τσι ?στε να μπορε?τε να διακρ?νετε ξεκ?θαρα ?λα ?σα υπ?ρχουν στον κ?σμο. Δεν αν?κετε ο?τε στον ουραν?, ο?τε στη γη, δεν ε?στε ο?τε αθ?νατοι ο?τε θνητο?, αλλ? ε?στε ο γλ?πτης του εαυτο? σας και ελε?θερα μπορε?τε να χτ?σετε τους εαυτο?ς σας σ?μφωνα με τη θ?λησ? σας". Τ? σημα?νει αυτ? κορ?τσια; Σημα?νει πως ε?ναι δυνατ? να φτι?ξετε τη ζω? σας».»

Και η ?ντυ; Αυτ? δεν λ?ει τ?ποτα, γιατ? πεθα?νει απ? την πρ?τη σελ?δα. Αυτ? δεν πρ?λαβε να μεγαλ?σει και μ?νο ?νας σπασμ?νος δ?σκος με τη φων? της απομ?νει να τραγουδ?ει, με το παρ?πονο, που ?χουν ?λοι ?σοι δεν κατ?φεραν να μεγαλ?σουν και να προσαρμοστο?ν στην πραγματικ?τητα:

«Look what they've done to my song, Ma  
Look what they've done to my song».

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### **Lela says**

I couldn't wait to finish this. One of the most horribly written books I've read. Whether the main fault of the author or the translation, something went terribly wrong.

The repetitive use of phrases to keep the story going got old quick and actually caused me to stop reading it for a month. There's only so many "that is/so to say..", "in other words...", and "meaning that"s you can take before going mad. With every instance of those words grouped together I would feel a low throbbing in my head caused from excessive jaw clenching.

"In other words" appeared 5 times in a span of 2 pages. I read this in kindle, so the pages weren't even that long.

The story was cluttered, trying too much without fleshing out anything in a capable style. It was over 500 pages so there was no excuse that there wasn't enough time. And it used that narrative of flipping back and forth between timelines. I'm personally not a fan, but I can take it if it's well written. This wasn't. Not just timelines, but characters would constantly switch and more than once a whole 5 pages was written about something happening to someone just for it to be unraveled and leaving you wondering what the heck happened.

I'm not hard to please despite how this review makes it look. But, my word, by the end I was pretty much just speed reading it to get it over with. By the time the end came and explained the big mystery about the dead girl I didn't care. I was wanting to join her.

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### **Evelina | AvalinahsBooks says**

For the first 100 pages the book was nearly impossible to read. But after that it became one of the few best books I've read for the last few years. The emotional variety is unbelievable. It also displays incredibly well how deeply people can burrow into conjectures and illusions and how tragic the consequences of silence can be.

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### **Amanda says**

I really think something must have gotten lost in the translation of this book. The storytelling is incredibly disjointed, and it doesn't feel as though it's a stylistic decision- it feels sloppy and confused. The title of the book doesn't really match up with the story, because we never really learn anything about "The American Girl" - instead we follow a bunch of half-baked characters around as they try to find out how and why she died. The author never explores the characters' inner worlds; instead she continues to tell the story from the outside so that we will remain as confused as possible throughout the entire book. The main characters, Sandra and Doris, seem to feel strong emotions that are never explained to us. We have to figure out how they feel from the random and shocking decisions they make. People are constantly killing themselves or each other and having sex and abusing one another and telling lies, but it's up to us to make up the underlying motives because the author doesn't create any for us. I finished the book because I wanted to know how the American girl really died, but the ending wasn't really worth it.

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## **Eda says**

### Zur Autorin

Monika Fagerholm ist eine finnische Autorin, die 1961 in Helsingfors geboren wurde. Zuerst veröffentlichte sie einige Kurzgeschichten. Ihren literarischen Durchbruch erreichte sie 1994 mit dem Roman *Underbara kvinnor vid vatten* (deutsch: *Wunderbare Frauen am Wasser*). Im selben Jahr wurde sie für den wichtigsten finnischen Literatur-Preis, den *Finlandia-Preis*, nominiert. *Den amerikanska flickan* (deutsch: *Das amerikanische Mädchen*) wurde 2005 erstmals veröffentlicht und stand monatelang auf den finnischen und schwedischen Bestseller-Listen.

### Zum Inhalt

Die junge Amerikanerin Eddie de Wire ertrinkt unter mysteriösen Umständen in einem Moorsee an der finnischen Küste und wird damit zu einem Mythos.

Wir schreiben das Jahr 1969. Eddie wohnt erst seit kurzem am Moorsee und zieht mit ihrer ungewöhnlichen Art die Aufmerksamkeit zweier Jungen auf sich: Björn und Bengt. Die Verwicklungen zwischen den Dreiern nehmen ein tragisches Ende. Eddie ertrinkt und ihr Freund Björn erhängt sich kurze Zeit später in einem Schuppen.

Die Freundinnen Sandra und Doris machen aus der Suche nach der Wahrheit ein Spiel. Sie versuchen die wirren und tiefen Zusammenhänge des Rätsels zu entknoten.

### Meine Meinung

Monika Fagerholm schreibt sehr diffus. Sie wechselt so schnell die Erzählperspektiven, dass man kaum hinterher kommt. Zu Beginn herrschte in meinem Kopf das totale Chaos. Auch das Personenverzeichnis am Anfang hilft einem als Leser nicht viel weiter. Man erkennt einfach keine Zusammenhänge und steht völlig im Dunkeln, egal wie intensiv man liest. Man ist zum Warten gezwungen. Warten darauf, dass die Autorin immer engere Kreise um des Rätsels Lösung zieht.

Die Sprache zieht einen in einen regelrechten Strudel. Nachdem man sich an Fagerholms Stil gewöhnt hat, kann man dem Roman nicht mehr entkommen. Der Drang, zu ergründen, was mit Eddie de Wire geschehen ist, fesselt bis zur letzten Seite.

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## **Urt? Leškut? says**

This book seemed very touching for me. I enjoy the author's style, short and very long sentences, subtle sense of humor, mysterious atmosphere, poetic nature, things that were unsaid and things that were repeated many many times. I think that this was necessary to create such a book! I found myself in some sense in this story, in Sandra and Doris. So, I was surprised of so many negative reviews of that book. I think they (others) didn't get the main idea of the book. It's truly beautiful and sad. Unfortunately, there are not translated the second book in my language (Lithuanian) - The Glitter scene. I wish to read! And to feel this wonderful and painfully mysterious feeling one more time! I would recommend this book to all daydreamers in the world as I believe would recommend the author herself.

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**Tatiaana says**

I gave this book 85 pages and then had to jump ship.

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