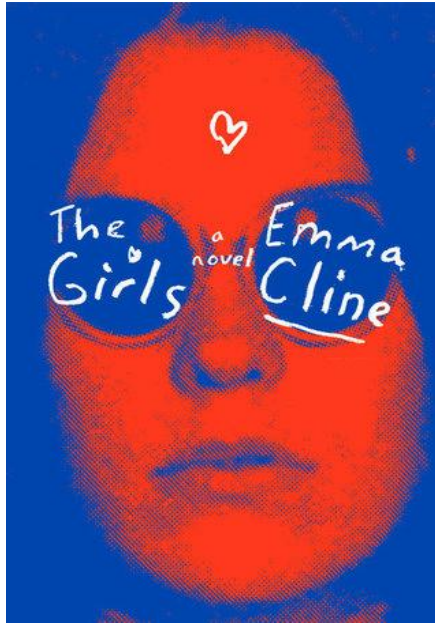


Rich Girl Gone Pagan

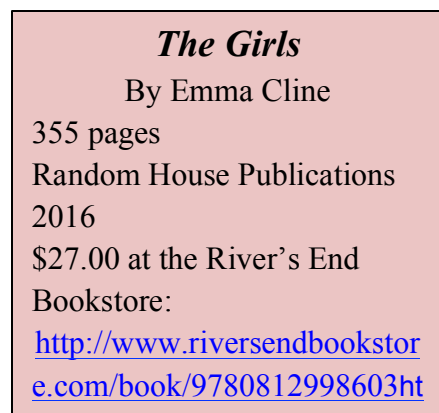
Emma Cline's *The Girls*



Every teenage girl has a secret life beyond the one she presents around her parents. But how far does it really go? In Emma Cline's first novel, *The Girls*, Evie Boyd finds herself in a group she never thought possible. The foundation of this entire novel is Cline's ability to create complex and distinct teenage girl characters, which can be very underwhelming if done poorly. Yet, Cline builds up all of the girls very differently.

Evie Boyd is an interesting fourteen-year-old girl who is bored with her mundane life in California suburbia. After countless summer days of chasing older boys, doing her friend's hair over and over, and avoiding her mother, she stumbles upon a mischievous group of girls stealing from the dumpsters by the park. A dark haired girl, named Suzanne, charms Evie, which causes naïve Evie to do dubious things for her. On a hot summer day, after a heated argument with her ditzy mother, Evie finds herself lost on a lonely road with a broken bike. A black bus with particular markings appears from the distance and offers her a ride back to their

camp.



Evie is a bizarre fourteen-year-old with a lot of interesting fantasies and desires. Cline makes the young teenager so believable because of the sexual curiosity that Evie has -- with both boys and girls. Cline does not bring up Evie's questioning sexuality only once, it's a reoccurring theme through out the book. This makes Evie's character much more believable and complex. This is also very relatable to some, making it a

**“It seemed strange that it
was a girl I was
imagining, not a boy.”**

factor to draw readers in. It also goes to show that Cline knows how to make a well-rounded and complex main character. She doesn't leave details out.

Very quickly, Evie becomes part of this raunchy group led by a messiah-like musician, Russell. Russell is leading this group of pagan girls and sharing everything with them, including his sexual attention. Evie soon finds herself spending more time at the ranch than at home, still completely gripped to Suzanne's mysteriously enthralling presence. Evie saw beauty in Suzanne, "even the pimples [Evie had] seen on her jaw," and the way she never cut her hair.

The ranch girls are also another great example of Cline's character development skills. These bawdy girls are all very different from each other, though they are always together and very

"How Helen acted like a baby, pulling on her pigtails and talking in a baby voice..."

close. One of the most memorable girls from the ranch is baby-voiced Helen who whines and carries herself like a child.

As the summer unfolds on the ranch, it becomes more obvious to Evie that she is now part of a cult with Russell as the leader. When Russell is "cheated" out of a promise, things begin to get a little rocky. Russell attempts to bribe the other party with girls (including Evie), parties, and money. But he soon resorts to violence and harassment when his gifts fail. After returning from her father's apartment, Evie finds herself in an unforgiving situation with Suzanne and the other girls.

The Girls is written in the past tense, and through the eyes of adult Evie, which allows Cline to jump back and forth between the past and present. The novel is split between four parts, with a small look into Evie's present life as an adult at the beginning of each. This is a great tactic because the reader can see how things unfold for Evie. This also gives the reader a break from the action and time to reflect about the overall story. Cline also uses this tactic to drop foreshadowing and expository information that is important to the reader. Although this is a great ploy, it sometimes just rips the reader from the story and leaves them wondering what they are even reading about. New characters, such as Sasha and Julian, are introduced and the reader has no clue who these people are until a few pages later.

The Girls is a novel filled with intense and specific details that keep coming up over and over again. These specific details can be anything from a familiar dress, scent, or character. This really allows the reader to connect to multiple different parts of the book while reading just one part. It is as if the reader is remembering the things that Evie is currently remembering in the story.

Although *The Girls* has a great story and conflict, it seems as if the climax is given away so early in the book. The main character, Evie, is recounting her life at the ranch and often refers to the major turning point in the book many times, in obvious ways. Of course, foreshadowing can be great, if it is used correctly and not too often. But about halfway through the book, I already knew how the ending would unfold! But Cline redeems herself by throwing in a bit of a twist right at the end that really surprised me.

Emma Cline really set the standards high for herself in her first novel, *The Girls*. This raunchy teenage tale was more than believable and unlike any book I have ever read, in a good way! With Cline's short and concise language, you could feel the character of Evie throughout the whole text. Yet, with long descriptive sentences, you could see the world she was living in and feel what she was feeling. This is a skill that not many authors have, but Cline has it and she knows how to use it. I have recommended this book to many people already. It is weird, ballsy, and just plain gross sometimes and I wish I could read it for the first time again.

Alex DeSacia is currently in his junior year at SUNY Oswego, studying film, creative writing, and philosophy. After attending graduate school, he plans to be a film theory professor.