



## **The Folded World**

*Amity Gaige*

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**The Folded World** Amity Gaige  
September 2007 Booksense Notable

Acclaimed for her exquisite prose and crystalline insights, Amity Gaige returns with *The Folded World*, the story of an idealistic young social worker drawn into the lives of his mentally ill clients. Charlie Shade was born into a quiet, prosperous life, but a sense of injustice dogs him. He feels destined to leave his life of "bread and laundry," to work instead with people in crisis. On his way, he meets his kindred spirit in Alice, a soulful young woman, living helplessly by laws of childhood superstition. Charlie's empathy with his clients — troubled souls like Hal, the high-school wrestling champion who undergoes a psychotic break, and Opal, the isolated young woman who claims "various philosophies have confused my life" — is both admirable and nearly fatal. An adoring husband and new father, Charlie risks his own cherished, private domestic world to help Hal, Opal, and others move beyond their haunted inner worlds into the larger world of love and connection.

A collision of extraordinary characters, *The Folded World* addresses the universal dilemma of love, wherein giving to another can seem like "the death of the world of oneself." With an unerring eye for both the joys and devastations of life, Amity Gaige once again reminds us of the pleasures and depths to be found in her fiction.

## The Folded World Details

Date : Published May 17th 2007 by Other Press (first published May 8th 2007)

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Author : Amity Gaige

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## From Reader Review *The Folded World* for online ebook

### Emily says

Such a deliciously strong start... i guess that would have been difficult to keep up. 3= a 4 for the first few chapters, and a 2 for the rest

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### Sarah Beth says

Charlie and Alice, two individuals who have always felt somehow other in their own families, meet and fall deeply in love. Soon, they're married, with Alice staying at home with their twin daughters and Charlie pursuing his career in social work. Soon, Charlie's empathy has been going too far for some of his mentally unstable clients, while Alice feels adrift navigating life with two infants and trapped in their one bedroom apartment.

Gaige tells Charlie and Alice's story with beautiful prose, which is why I was initially drawn into the story. For example: "She had never been forewarned of happiness, so to her it was a complete surprise. She had a husband of the sort she never dreamed existed - gallant and tender and loyal as daybreak. It was as if she had died and gone to heaven, a heaven where you made love to yourself all day and he made love to you all night, and in between, you read" (30). Or the description of a female academic walking home in the evening: "tip-topping back and forth like a teacup full of buttermilk" (113).

And yet - at times the writing seemed forced, as if the author was consciously trying to show off how poignant and deep the writing was. For instance, in the opening pages Charlie as a small boy is supposedly somehow cosmically aware that Alice has been born, though they don't meet until they are adults. "The sun pulsed, hot on his blond head, and the paisley of the carpet pulsed, and the room smelled vividly and wonderfully of sun damage, and he felt, all at once, like a struck match, and that was the first time he ever thought of Alice" (4). I also wasn't sure what to make of the strange and violent premonitions Charlie's unnamed grandmother experiences where she imagines Charlie murdered: "She staggered backward from the body, cut as it was, lying as it was, throat cut, the head cocked and eyes staring as if appraising a last loveliness, and once again the grandmother became aware that she was standing in a white room, holding a newborn baby" (25).

I did like Charlie and Alice. I liked that Charlie's downfall is his goodness - he can't stop at the rules because he wants to do everything possible to help his clients. I liked Alice and Charlie together, so idealistic and in love in their tiny apartment. And I even liked Alice's sort of unlikeable mother with her "wintry complexion" (4). I also liked how Charlie's clients' lives were incorporated into the novel, since they were such a large part of Charlie's life. Although at time the plot seemed to struggle to right itself, this is about two individuals struggling both together and apart in their lives and how they navigate the early years of their marriage.

3.5 stars

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### Liz says

I had a difficult time rating this book because there were times when I really liked it but then other times I just liked it. The writing is interesting and very well maintained throughout the novel. The characters were believable but their relationship was a bit over the top making it unbelievable until the author brought babies into their lives. Finally reality set in and we got a good look at how hard marriage is especially when both the husband and the wife carry a lot of baggage that they have trouble facing and unloading. The look at mental illness is well done and troubling.

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### **Nancy Davis says**

Complex story of a young couple and their first few years of marriage; she is shy, he is not. He throws himself into his work as a social worker and gets caught up (too much so) with his patients. Meanwhile, they become parents of twins. Alice is bored, home alone, and lonely while Charlie works. A few other characters add complexity to the plot: her mother, Opal, Hal . . . and I do like the way the story ends. Written in surrealistic, almost flowery language, it is a smooth read and full of thought provoking scenes.

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### **Eoin says**

Had to stop after the sentence "her days were filled with marriage and bergamot". Too much.

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### **Alee says**

The Folded World is the story of Alice, a bookish loner, and Charlie, an idealist who wants more than anything to "do good" with his life. They meet by chance and fall in love almost overnight. Charlie becomes a social worker and takes his career very seriously. Alice spends nearly all of her time caring for their young twin daughters. As the demands of their daily lives begin to pull them away from one another, the book takes a surprising turn. I don't want to give too much away, but as the title suggests, people's lives become connected in unexpected ways. The book is honest about how things rarely turn out the way we expect them to, but it still ends on a hopeful note. The overall tone seems to suggest that the "folds" we cannot foresee in our lives often have the most lasting positive impacts.

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### **Riah says**

A journey into the madness of love and vulnerability. There is no explanation for this book that can do it justice. The characters are utterly tragic, their views undeniably existential yet surreal. What strength does it take to survive madness? What strength does it take to survive love? How do you balance these aspects of life, and how can you possibly balance your compassion with your essential passion? This book shares a beautiful perspective of what some would take as *quotidienne*. Enjoy!

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### **Lolly K Dandeneau says**

Why I really liked it is for the writing, which annoyed other readers. I happen to believe in beautiful rambling sentences because it is better than reading elementary ones. Someone mentioned that nothing happens in this story but that isn't really true. The things that happen do so beneath the surface. This novel of a young married couple turns from quirky and sweet to dark and bitter. Of course there is sadness in the character study, how can there not be character study when one of the main characters in the story is a social worker with a naive belief he can fix all the 'crazy' people out there? I think some readers were angered because the ending is too true to life, nothing explosive nor murderous happens even though the book flirts with the promise of it. Life can be that way to as relationships can burn and sort of fizzle out- a big fat dud. I admit, the ending wasn't anything that is going to change you, but it is still a really interesting book. Maybe I am just partial to quirky people, real and imagined. Truth is novels are an escape for many, and there aren't a lot of readers that want to invest in literature that hums as their own life does. They want explosions or mystery or hot affairs with vampires or heck, just an easy fix to a crappy life. You won't get that here though. Still I liked it... I look forward to her new novel when it is released. I think this is a writer to watch!

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### **Kristin says**

This book falls in the "hard to describe" category. When my husband asked me what was about, I think I said "a young married couple, but a lot of other things, too." On the back of the book, a review said something to the effect that this book is about how lives are touched by both the absence and presence of love. It's a fitting little nutshell. The book is both subtle and particular at the same time. And the main reason I gave it four stars was Amity Gaige's writing. She has a knack for weird metaphors and rich imagery. As I was first reading the book, it kind of screamed out "I'm being poignant!" but I didn't get that so much as the book went on. At some points, it almost felt more like a poem than a novel, especially in the emotionally-charged moments (like the internal monologues of the mentally ill). Quirky, yet meaningful.

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### **Matthew says**

I was really displeased by this book. I felt the concept was ill-conceived, the writing was mediocre, and the characters' actions, interactions and behavior just bizarre.

Gaige wields a heavy head, weaving together a series of coincidences that builds an expectation of some significant resolution at the close of the book that we never see, making the opening pages of this book misleading.

I would recommend staying away from this one.

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### **Anne says**

Showcases the complexities of human nature and relationships. Charlie Shade's dedication to his patients (as a social worker) and to his family often conflict. Will love or duty prevail?

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## Casey says

Once again, one of those books that deals with my favorite semi-sub-genre: people gradually falling out of love/a marriage in crisis. I don't know why this fascinates me so much, both in life and in literature-- I just find it so weird that when people get married, they love each other so much. Then the years add up, and there are these little shifts and resentments in the relationship, and all of a sudden, they don't love (or know) each other any more. How does this happen? Why doesn't someone say, "Hey, we need to stop and figure this out"? Anyway, I liked that this novel addresses this problem, and also says that a failed marriage is not inevitable. I also enjoyed the little injections of magic, and the idea that fate isn't certain.

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## gwen g says

Looooooooooved this. Gaige takes an ordinary story about ordinary lives -- neglected woman, golden-boy guy, chance meeting on the street, falling in love, twin baby girls -- and turns it into something utterly beautiful by the sheer force of language and passion.

My favorite passage: "... that the universe was treacherous only in that it would outlast you, and knew your death and slowly breathed you in your whole life, but that despite all this, there were small ruins all over the territory, the posts and beams of people who built there regardless, on fog, on blackness, on starlight, houses in which they were safe merely by being in them together." (282)

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## Khaulah says

I liked certain parts of it, but others I found boring...

Since I really loved my psychology class in the summer semester, I was very interested in reading about the thoughts that go through the mind of a psychotic patient, and how at the time they seem to be right and beautiful, and they seem to make sense to them, yet they're entrapping them in their own selves. I understood how a suicidal psychotic patient might think, and that it's not only about despair or self loathing, it's also about them being exhausted of the years of uncured mental illness and need for freedom out of it.

This book was a good finale for my understanding of psychology :)

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## Anne says

This is one of those books that seems better to me after I've finished and sat back to think about it than it did while I was reading it. Charlie, a social worker dealing with the mentally ill, and Alice, the young daughter of a librarian, meet and fall in love with the "better" qualities of the other. Once they are married, and the parents of twins, Charlie finds himself all-consumed by his work, and in particular one client named Opal. Alice, on the other hand, finds herself overwhelmed by parenthood and Charlie's absences. She seeks to escape through the books recommended by a local bookseller - who just happens to be one of Charlie's former clients. I found the writing initially difficult to get into - the author changes the character from whom's perspective she is telling the story every couple paragraphs - and given that many of the characters suffer from mental illness, this doesn't lend itself to the easiest to follow story. But, I did think that Gaige presented a very realistic picture of relationships - how people deal with their pasts and issues within the

context of their marriages, and how the reasons we come to love someone can often turn out to be the reasons we cannot ultimately make the relationship work. Overall, this book also presents an enlightened view of the mentally ill and how they are and should be cared for in our society.

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### **Abbie says**

I just don't get it. This was the same as *O My Darling* - though I liked that much better. The story starts out wonderfully deep and interesting, and devolves quickly into something nonsensical.

She overwrites, and it's distracting. I particularly hate it, because I often - almost always - find that an overload of description detracts from the human emotions in a book. That's certainly the case here, and I kept feeling as if we, the readers, were missing something. The book was too odd for what it was, and I think she should have done it differently.

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### **J says**

Read her recent work "Schroder" and loved it, so I wanted to read more by this author... But, I just couldn't get into this book. The poetic language was confusing, contradictory and nonsensical. I also didn't buy into the "soul-mate" premise. As a little boy, Charlie "senses" the birth of his great love Alice from 500 miles away. Too far fetched for me!

I also noticed a couple spelling and grammar mistakes in the text. I'm assuming these were purposely done by the college professor/author as poetic license, but that just made me dislike the pretentious novel more.

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### **Sara says**

The point of view shifts in this book are incredibly well done. I loved the movement that happened through this story, and the backstory that came through in the italicized sections. I breezed through it fairly quickly. The portrayal of marriage as this wonderful, alienating, rocky, but persevering state was so refreshing and touching. All in all, the darkness and honesty of the story was comforting. Great book.

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### **Bonbon says**

As much as I hate the word 'quirky' I am going to use it to describe this book and I mean that in a good way. I wasn't too sure what the heck was happening in the very beginning, but I am somewhat into the book now and I have to say that it's very well written. Some lines are so spot on in detail and feeling, and while I am a little anxious about the outcome of the characters, I think I am going to stick with this one.

Edited to add: I finished this the other day. I really liked it. I found the writing really descriptive and spot on and I could really relate to her portrayal of relationships.

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## Laura says

I had very high hopes for this book; there were even a few parts early on that led me to believe that it might end up on my list of favorites. The author has a gift for powerful, beautifully true statements that at times made me wish I had a pencil handy to underline them, and the book offers a rare and astute view into the overly-empathetic mind. It feels strange even to write that phrase, because I strongly believe that what the world needs most is *more* empathy, but I also know from my own experience how difficult it can be to go through life as an overly empathetic, highly sensitive person. I identified with Charlie a great deal, with his natural inclination to help others, and his inability to draw boundaries. Like him, I have gotten too attached and determined to "save" others, feeling their pain so acutely that my rational mind decides to take the day off every now and then. So yes, there was a lot that I both identified with and loved in this book, but unfortunately the last chapters were a disappointment. They didn't seem to match the rest of the book in my opinion, almost as if the author was determined for a \_\_\_\_ ending (I'll leave out the adjective, to avoid spoilers), and tacked one on, after writing an entire novel headed in another direction. The ending simply did not feel authentic to me, which is a shame since so much of the book did.

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