

# Fall From Grace Short Guide

## Fall From Grace by Andrew Greeley

The following sections of this BookRags Literature Study Guide is offprint from Gale's For Students Series: Presenting Analysis, Context, and Criticism on Commonly Studied Works: Introduction, Author Biography, Plot Summary, Characters, Themes, Style, Historical Context, Critical Overview, Criticism and Critical Essays, Media Adaptations, Topics for Further Study, Compare & Contrast, What Do I Read Next?, For Further Study, and Sources.

(c)1998-2002; (c)2002 by Gale. Gale is an imprint of The Gale Group, Inc., a division of Thomson Learning, Inc. Gale and Design and Thomson Learning are trademarks used herein under license.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Encyclopedia of Popular Fiction: "Social Concerns", "Thematic Overview", "Techniques", "Literary Precedents", "Key Questions", "Related Titles", "Adaptations", "Related Web Sites". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

The following sections, if they exist, are offprint from Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults: "About the Author", "Overview", "Setting", "Literary Qualities", "Social Sensitivity", "Topics for Discussion", "Ideas for Reports and Papers". (c)1994-2005, by Walton Beacham.

All other sections in this Literature Study Guide are owned and copyrighted by BookRags, Inc.



# Contents

<a href="#">Fall From Grace Short Guide.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">Social Concerns.....</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Techniques.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Themes.....</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">Key Questions.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Literary Precedents.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Related Titles.....</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Copyright Information.....</a>	<a href="#">10</a>



# Characters

Kathleen Leary Donahue is a member of a prominent Chicago political family who seems to have everything. As with a number of Greeley's female protagonists, she is in her forties, but as "sleek and lean" as she was in her adolescence, with "splashes of silver streaking her otherwise flaming red hair." She is pursuing a Ph.D. in history, but despite her intelligence and her apparent life of luxury, she is trapped in an abusive and unhappy marriage. Kathleen fits the psychological profile of a battered woman, staying in her marriage out of fear until her survival instincts finally take over and she throws her husband out. Kathleen functions to demonstrate that battered women know neither class boundaries nor IQ curves.

Kieran O'Kerrigan, Kathleen's childhood love, is a psychiatrist who has returned to Chicago after a twenty-year absence. Because he is a psychiatrist (a favorite choice of a profession for Greeley's characters), he can serve several functions in the novel. Within the first few pages, he has figured out that Kathleen is a battered wife and that her husband has been unfaithful to her. He is able through consultation with his trainer psychologist to understand how to best help her. Kieran serves the primary function of putting psychological background information on pedophilia and satanic cults into the story form in a way in which it can be understood by lay readers.

Kathleen's brother, Bishop James Leary, serves to represent a well-intentioned but ignorant Catholic Church.

Unlike Kieran, James cannot read the signs in Kathleen's troubled marriage, and he blames her for her husband's urge to wander. He likewise cannot see that pedophile priests are a danger for the Archdiocese, and he misplaces his sympathies with the priests (whom he assumes have been unjustly accused) rather than with their victims.

By contrast, Fr. Brendan McNulty represents Greeley's point of view in that he believes that getting at the truth is worth the risk of what the hierarchy might see as a scandal, because it is only by uncovering the truth that both the perpetrators and the victims can begin their healing processes.

While the techniques of the novel allow these four characters to be fully developed, the other characters who narrate the story — Brien Donahue and Hugh Leary — are not fully developed.

The major contribution of Hugh's narrative is to plot development rather than the revelation of his own character. Brien remains flat because he is meant to be the villain (albeit one whose actions the reader can comprehend as more "troubled" than truly "evil").

## Social Concerns

Fall From Grace is perhaps Andrew Greeley's most overt novel of social concern. It grew out of two years of reading about, reflecting upon and writing newspaper columns concerning the topics of battered women and pedophilia. The novel also touches upon the social concerns of homosexuality and satanic cults which ritualistically abuse children. While generally given favorable reviews, Fall From Grace was faulted by some for what was seen as a degeneration into melodrama, perhaps the result of Greeley's attempt to use fiction to dramatize social concerns documented by what he knew to be important primary sources which the general public might never read. The novel is dedicated to the man who delved into the psychology of pedophilia; Greeley's effort is an attempt to dramatize that research for a wider reading audience.

The primary plot of Fall From Grace concerns the story of Kathleen Leary Donahue. Brutalized by her husband, who is seeking a seat in the U.S. Senate, Kathleen is seen by her family and many of her friends as the troublemaker in the marriage. Afraid to seek a divorce or even counseling for her problems because she is apprehensive that the publicity might ruin her husband's political career and unleash more of his fury upon her, Kathleen tries to quietly cope with the alcoholic and abusive Brien until she receives a threatening phone call from his homosexual lover one day.

The secondary plot of the novel concerns the problems faced by Kathleen's brother, Bishop James Leary, when a priest of his diocese is accused of sexually abusing children. Drafted before the explosion of the pedophile crisis in the Archdiocese of Chicago, the novel deals on a fictional level with what proved by the time of the novel's publication to be a very real problem.

Like Kathleen, Bishop Leary tries to lead his own life and cover up the problems which plague the Church instead of dealing with them. Separate individual concerns and separate social crises are thus handled in parallel ways. Fear of sensational publicity and humiliating public criticism are the rationales which tie together both sister and brother's attempts to sweep the dirt of their respective houses out of public sight.

## Techniques

Fall From Grace is a series of narratives told from six different points of view, another feature which earned it criticism from reviewers, who found the narratives disjointed and confusing.

The story often weaves between past and present, detailing the current status between Kathleen and Brien, then moving to flashbacks of Kathleen's early relationship with Kieran. Often a brutal sexual scene between Kathleen and Brien is followed by a tender adolescent memory of the respect and concern and affection which obviously existed in the childhood relationship between Kathleen and Kieran. While such techniques can sometimes be confusing to a reader, the switches in narration and the obvious switches in theme and tone serve to illustrate the vast differences in the treatment of one woman by two different men. The contrasts between Brendan's narratives and those of James serve to portray two very different clerics and to illustrate the theme that the Church cannot always be judged by its leaders. While the majority of the narratives are from Kathleen's and Kieran's points of view and detail the rekindling of their adolescent love, italicized interior monologues give the reader a glimpse into the mind of Brien as he ponders his relationship with both Kathleen and his male lover. Other narratives come from Bishop James Leary and Fr. Brendan McNulty, who convey the plot of the pedophile crisis. Letters from Kathleen's father comprise yet another set of narratives which help to illuminate Kieran's past and why he disappeared from Kathleen's life for twenty years.



# Themes

The epigraph of the novel is taken from II Corinthians 5:17: "The old things have passed away; behold new things have come." *Fall From Grace* is an attempt to deal boldly with the new and often frightening order of things in contemporary society. The novel deals frankly with the changing character of marriage and its lost expectations and ideals. In a parallel plot, it deals with the apparent loss of ideals and expectations in the Catholic Church and the hypocrisy of some of its priests. However, the novel is also an affirmation that the real ideals in society's institutions will endure despite the "new things which have come."

The quest motif is the spine of this Greeley novel. Kieran O'Kerrigan searches for the answer to why his childhood love might be asking him to perform an AIDS test on her and her three children and why she has bruises on her body. The search for answers leads him to discover the nightmare marriage in which Kathleen is trapped and for which her brother James insists that she is to blame.

Brendan McNulty's quest is to make Bishop James Leary aware of the Church's unchristian attempts to buy off the families of the victims of priestly child abuse and to illuminate for him the true nature of the affliction — that a pedophile hurts an average of 300 victims in a lifetime and that unlike an alcoholic, a pedophile does not respond to treatment.

The hope in the book lies in its themes of forgiveness and redemption.

As in many of Greeley's other novels, *Fall From Grace* emphasizes that it is neither the ideal nor the quest for it which is at fault. Faults and flaws lie within individual human natures and are deserving of forgiveness.

Redemption and absolution are major themes of the novel. Kathleen realizes after Brien's death that he had demons to conquer and not enough time to conquer them. The most poignant forgiveness comes, however, from the parents of a boy sexually abused by a priest. "They told us we should never judge the church by what its leaders do," says the father. Adds the boy's mother: "What good does it do to be angry at them? They're not the church. We're the church."

## Key Questions

A reader needs to be neither Catholic nor Irish to form strong opinions concerning Andrew Greeley's novels.

Discussions can center on both the manner of his storytelling and the content he presents. Because of this, they can serve as excellent exercises in how various and often opposing literary opinions can be formed, and whether or not they are supported by valid or invalid evidence.

And because so much of what he writes is drawn from his own research, Greeley can also serve as a springboard from fiction into other genres. The seeds of his novels can be found in many of his sociological and theological books as well as in his poetry and personal journals. In many cases, actual scenes from the novels can be traced quite directly to passages in his other writings. "Fiction is the best way of getting . . . insights through the secular barriers into general culture," he has said. Greeley's works can provoke an interesting debate about why a writer whose works are grounded in the empirical data he uncovers might be called unrealistic by critics.

1. Eight Chicago-area Catholic newspapers refused to carry advertisements for (or to review) *Fall From Grace*. The editor of one explained this position by saying that doing so would be "inappropriate for our family audience."

Given the social issues with which *Fall From Grace* deals, discuss the validity and irony of this editorial position.

2. Discuss what usually happens when civic or religious groups attempt to ban books from public consumption.

How does it affect their sales?

3. Greeley refers to Kathleen several times in the novel as a "survivor" and makes note of her "Irish survival instincts" (Greeley often represents such instincts and strength in his female characters by crowning them with red hair). Discuss whether Kathleen is an example of what reviewers tend to see as Greeley's "annoying ethnocentrism" or whether she represents a universal human trait.

4. Discuss the techniques which Greeley uses to tell this story. Do you agree with the reviewers who find them confusing? Consider other writers who use multiple points of view to tell their stories (e.g., William Faulkner, James Joyce). Is the criticism of Greeley fair? Why or why not?

5. Is *Fall From Grace* an example of fiction serving as a vehicle for the serious consideration and discussion of social issues in the tradition of American literary realism? Discuss its similarities to other novels of social concern which you may have read.

## Literary Precedents

As David Hacker so aptly stated in his Detroit Free Press review of the novel: "The value of *Fall From Grace* is in surfacing the dreadful, and forcing the Church to realize that it is perched on a social and political San Andreas fault."

In its efforts to expose the weaknesses of an institution, *Fall From Grace* is similar to the works of Sinclair Lewis and other American writers whose purpose it has been to expose the follies and corruption in American society, a particularly democratic mode of literary pursuit. Greeley has maintained that the Church in the United States has been highly influenced by the democratic environment in which it exists, and that therefore the Catholic Church in the United States has always been fundamentally different from the one envisioned by Rome, which places heavy emphasis on hierarchy. Whereas the Church in Rome sees itself as authoritative and above criticism, the environment of democracy has made the Church in the U.S. as open to criticism as any of its other institutions.

Greeley plays the role of the inside critic in this work of fiction just as he has in many of his nonfictional works.





## Related Titles

Although his publishers classify *Fall From Grace* as part of Greeley's general fiction, it is actually thematically linked to two other novels in which the character Margaret Mary Ward Keenan appears. These novels also contain a plot or subplot concerning battered or sexually abused women.

Maggie is the protagonist of *The Search for Maggie Ward* (1991), a novel which outlines her troubled first marriage and her abuse by her first husband. In *The Cardinal Virtues* (1990), Maggie makes a brief appearance as the mother of one of the main characters, Fr. Jamie Keenan, the new curate of St. Finian's Parish who assists the aging and somewhat cynical pastor, Fr.

Laurence O'Toole McAuliffe (a character who also makes a major appearance in the novel *An Occasion of Sin*, 1991) to regain his ideals and commitment to parish life. One of the subplots of *An Occasion of Sin* concerns a woman who was sexually abused as a child.

In *The Cardinal Virtues*, Maggie primarily serves to demonstrate the ideal of a warm and nurturing mother. Fr.

Jamie is described as a "sensitive, tender, and sympathetic man" precisely because he grew up "in a warm relationship with such a mother as Margaret Mary Ward Keenan . . . ." Secondly, Maggie represents Greeley's ideal that womanly beauty is enhanced by age.

But most importantly, she represents the kind of plot motif and character vehicle which Greeley often creates in his novels — a kind of wise counselor who serves as a "doctor of the soul" for characters in need of serious counseling.

Andrew Greeley's research has revealed that counseling and therapy are most effective when a person's advisor is of the opposite sex, but of the same ethnic background. Catholic women, his research uncovers, have happier and more sexually fulfilling marriages when they have an open and trusting relationship with a priest-confidante.

With her Ph.D. in psychology, Maggie often serves as a surrogate priest as well as a symbol of the rise of the Irish through education to positions of power. In *Fall From Grace*, in particular, she functions as an advisor and confidante figure for Kieran O'Kerrigan, just as the male priest-figures in many of Greeley's other novels serve as confidantes for female characters in need of healing assistance. Until the Catholic Church approves of and ordains female priests (a cause which Greeley has promoted), Maggie Ward and other characters like her (e.g., psychiatrist Mary Kate Ryan Murphy in "The Time Between the Stars" series) will probably continue to serve in future novels as Greeley's ministers to the psychological and spiritual needs of males.



# Copyright Information

## Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Editor - Kirk H. Beetz, Ph.D.

Library of Congress  
Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Beacham's Guide to Literature for Young Adults

Includes bibliographical references.

Summary: A multi-volume compilation of analytical essays on and study activities for fiction, nonfiction, and biographies written for young adults.

Includes a short biography for the author of each analyzed work.

1. Young adults—Books and reading. 2. Young adult literature—History and criticism. 3.

Young adult literature—Bio-bibliography. 4. Biography—Bio-bibliography.

[1. Literature—History and criticism. 2. Literature—Bio-bibliography]

I. Beetz, Kirk H., 1952

Z1037.A1G85 1994 028.1'62 94-18048 ISBN 0-933833-32-6

Copyright ©, 1994, by Walton Beacham. All rights to this book are reserved. No part of this work may be used or reproduced in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or in any information or storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the copyright owner, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews. For information, write the publisher, Beacham Publishing, Inc., 2100 "S" Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20008.

Printed in the United States of America First Printing, November 1994