



## Falling Angels

*Tracy Chevalier*

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# Falling Angels

Tracy Chevalier

## Falling Angels Tracy Chevalier

In her *New York Times* bestselling follow-up, Tracy Chevalier once again paints a distant age with a rich and provocative palette of characters. Told through a variety of shifting perspectives- wives and husbands, friends and lovers, masters and their servants, and a gravedigger's son-*Falling Angels* follows the fortunes of two families in the emerging years of the twentieth century.

## Falling Angels Details

Date : Published September 24th 2002 by Penguin Books (first published 2001)

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Author : Tracy Chevalier

Format : Paperback 336 pages

Genre : Historical, Historical Fiction, European Literature, British Literature, Fiction

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## From Reader Review Falling Angels for online ebook

### Sotiris Karaiskos says

The second book of Tracy Chevalier I read in a short time and what I can say is that it offered me another special reading experience. I can't explain it exactly based on logic but this quiet way writing and these simple but special stories that are written with attention to detail create an effect that is particularly enjoyable to me. Of course in the case of this book I confess that in the beginning I struggled a bit, this strange structure with the very small chapters and the continuously alternating POV so I believed that the final impression would be rather mediocre. As, however, got used in this structure and could follow better story that was unfolding in front I started to like the book more and more and until I got to the end I was really enchanted.

To get things right from the start, the author takes us to the day of the death of Queen Victoria, in 1901 in a typical British cemetery of the era. There, under the gaze of a stone Angel, two young girls become friends and then we follow their common path within the next 10 years, a course that largely revolves around this cemetery. This decade marks a transitional era, of course, is the end of the Victorian era, the beginning of a new century that was supposed to bring massive changes in all sectors. In these years the two girlfriends live through sorrows and joys, growing up and maturing, watching puzzled the social changes of the era and all aspects of life of adults who show the same puzzlement, that in some reaches the point of great turmoil. The writer giving us the perspective of many people creates a fairly comprehensive picture of how people were facing this new era. Others faced it with disbelief, others with indifference, others were trying to become part of this wave of change.

in short we have a touching story of friendship, a record of the life of the people of the era, of their hopes and their concerns against a backdrop of social changes and the Victorian obsession with death and mourning etiquette. The last is that it gives a romantic tone throughout the book, and as it is the subject of extensive study by the author makes it stand out, at least in my own eyes. A book that moved me, made me reflect, somewhere brought tears to my eyes and in the end left me with a bitter smile by realising that it is not a story about death but about life that always finds a way to continue, with the ceremonial rites of death and mourning to play an important role. A really wonderful book.

Δε?τερο βιβλ?ο της Tracy Chevalier που διαβ?ζω σε σ?ντομο χρονικ? δι?στημα και αυτ? και αυτ? που μπορ? να πω ε?ναι ?τι μου πρ?σφερε ?λλη μ?α ιδια?τερη αναγνωστικ? εμπειρ?α. Δεν μπορ? να το εξηγ?σω ακριβ?ς με β?ση τη λογικ? αλλ? αυτ?ς ο ?συχος τρ?πος γραφ?ς και αυτ?ς οι απλ?ς αλλ? ξεχωριστ?ς ιστορ?ες που ε?ναι γραμμ?νες με προσοχ? στη λεπτομ?ρεια δημιουργο?ν ?να αποτ?λεσμα που μου ε?ναι ιδια?τερα απολαυστικ?. Β?βαια στην περ?πτωση αυτο? του βιβλ?ου ομοιογ? πως στην αρχ? λ?γο δυσκολε?τηκα, αυτ? η περ?εργη δομ? του με τα πολ? μικρ? κεφ?λαια και της συνεχ?ς εναλλασσ?μενης οπτικ?ς γων?ας με μπ?ρδενε αρκετ? και ?τσι π?στεψα ?τι η τελικ? εντ?πωση θα ε?ναι μ?λλον μ?τρια. Καθ?ς, ?μως, συν?θιζα σε αυτ? την δομ? και μπορο?σα να παρακολουθ?σω καλ?τερα την ιστορ?α που εκτυλισσ?ταν μπροστ? μου το βιβλ?ο ?ρχισε να μου αρ?σει ?λο και περισσ?τερο και μ?χρι να φτ?σω στο τ?λος ε?χα πραγματικ? μαγευτε?.

Να τα π?ρω ?μως τα πρ?γματα απ? την αρχ? συγγραφ?ας μας μεταφ?ρει στην ημ?ρα του θαν?του της βασ?λισσας Βικτορ?ας, στο 1901 σε ?να τυπικ? βρετανικ? νεκροταφε?ο της εποχ?ς. Εκε?, κ?τω απ? το βλ?μμα εν?ς π?τρινου αγγ?λου, δ?ο μικρ? κορ?τσια γ?νονται φ?λες και στη συν?χεια παρακολουθ?με την κοιν? πορε?α τους μ?σα στα επ?μενα 10 χρ?νια, μ?α πορε?α που σε μεγ?λο βαθμ? περιστρ?φεται γ?ρω απ? αυτ? το νεκροταφε?ο. Αυτ? η δεκαετ?α φυσικ? σηματοδοτε? μ?α

μεταβατική εποχή, ενναί το τρίλογος της περιφήμης βικτωριανής εποχής, η αρχή εννοείται που επρόκειτο να φέρει τεραστίες αλλαγές σε λίους τους τομείς. Σε αυτή τη χρονιά οι δύο φίλες γνωρίζουν λίγες και χαράς, μεγάληνον και ωριμότερον παρακολουθούντας αμέρχαντα τις κοινωνικές αλλαγές της εποχής και λίγες τις πτυχές της ζωής των ενηλίκων, οι οποίοι δε γνωρίζουν την διάσταση αμηχανίας, που σε ορισμένους φέρει στο σημερινό της μεγάλης αναταραχής. Η συγγραφέας δημοσιεύει μαζί την οπτική γωνία πολλών ανθρώπων δημιουργώντας μια αρκετά ολοκληρωμένη εικόνα του τρόπου που αντιμετωπίζουν αυτή την εποχή. Λίγοι την αντιμετωπίζουν με δυσπιστία, λίγοι με αδιαφορία, λίγοι προσπαθούσαν να γνωρίζουν μέρος αυτού του σαρωτικού καθηματισμού αλλαγές.

Με λίγα λόγια γνωρίζουμε μια συγκινητική ιστορία φίλων, μια καταγραφή της ζωής των ανθρώπων της εποχής, των ελπίδων τους και των προβλημάτων τους με φίντο τις κοινωνικές αλλαγές και την βικτωριανή εμμονή με το θάνατο και την εθιμοτυπία των προθους. Το τελευταίο ενναί που δημοσιεύεται με το θάνατο της Βιβλίου και καθίσταται δικό μου το μήτια. Η βιβλίο που με συγκινεί, με κάνει να προβληματίστηκα, καπού μου φέρει δικρανά στα μήτια και στην εποχή με τη συγγραφέα την Κατερίνα Ζεμπέλη. Η συγγραφέα της Ζεμπέλης με τη συνειδητοποίηση της δεν ενναί μια ιστορία για τον θάνατο αλλά για τη ζωή που προσεκτικά παρουσιάζει την ζωή της Κατερίνας Ζεμπέλη, με τα τελευταία γεγονότα της.

## K.D. Absolutely says

Gaslit England during the turn of the century. The story starts during the funeral of Queen Victoria (1837-1901) and ends during the funeral of King Edward VII (1901-1910). On their visit to the cemetery to pay respect to their beloved queen, two families meet: the **Colemans** and the **Waterhouses** and their relationships are started by the friendship between their two 5-y/o daughters, **Maude Coleman** and **Lavinia Waterhouse**. They meet when they are 5 years old and the story ends when they are in the brink of adulthood at the age of 15.

One noteworthy aspect of this novel: narrated in first person by *each of the major characters* without losing the story's focus and the delivery of its message: that women are **not** the weaker sex.

The plot is thin and the prose is easy yet mesmerizing in its beauty. The frequent reference to cemeteries and death seems to be a reminder to its readers that we are all mortals and all of us will die sooner or later. So, it is proper that we do what is right and contribute in our own ways to leave this world a better place just like what Kitty Coleman and her support to suffragettes' dream of having women vote during elections. It also teaches us that we are all human beings and we commit mistakes like Jenny Whitby's pregnancy and Kitty's affair with Richard and the abortion of their baby. It also shows us that time changes no matter what we do like how the Waterhouses try to hold on to their conventional beliefs compared to the openness of the Colemans to change.

The title comes from the angel in the grave of the Waterhouses that falls and breaks into parts in one of the scenes. In another, it is Lavinia's belief, being a more imaginative child, that the falling stars are actually falling angels that are falling because they are going to earth to deliver some messages. The more practical-minded Maude insists that they are meteorites and not angels. These are 5 year old girls in England in 1901 and this is an example of how Chevalier provides the contrast between the two girls.

Okay, those really are not new. The novel is cute though. Smooth reading and Chevalier's attention to details

and making use of those details to make her story worth-reading is something that I appreciated. There are still nice novels that do not need to have huge political impact, endorse some earth-shaking philosophy or use big words for me to enjoy. Sometimes, surprises come in small package and this novel for me definitely falls in that category. Not a 1001. Not a 501. No awards from Pulitzer, Booker, etc. No one of my friends here in Goodreads recommended this but definitely a joy, although there are two deaths towards the end, to read.

## Cheryl Bennett says

This book grabbed me from the very first page. Set at the turn of the century, the story takes place amidst the women's suffrage movement. Gender issues are also noted, whereas the man was the head of the household and "handled" the wife.

Each character speaks individually, allowing the reader to listen and decide for themselves where to put the importance of each character. The voice of the youngest children is included, as is the maid, cook, grave digger to the "gubner."

Issues of class are also raised in this story from the servants and grave diggers to those of the most forward thinking family.

**Amin says**

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### **Alex says**

I enjoyed this book from the first to the last page. When Maude Coleman and Lavinia Waterhouse, both five years of age, meet at their families' adjoining cemetery plots on the day after Queen Victoria's death, the friendship that results between sensitive, serious-minded Maude and narcissistic, melodramatic Livy is not unlikely, despite the difference in social classes. But the continuing presence in their lives of a young gravedigger, Simon Field, is. Far too cheeky for a boy of his age and class, Simon plays an important part in the troubles that will overtake the two families. Other characters are gifted with insights inappropriate to their age or station in life. Yet Chevalier again proves herself an astute observer of a social era, especially in her portrayal of the lingering sentimentality, prejudices and early stirrings of social change of the Victorian age. When Maude's mother, Kitty, becomes obsessively involved with the emerging suffragette movement, the plot gathers momentum. While it's obvious that tragedy is brewing, Chevalier shows imaginative skill in two neatly accomplished surprises, and the denouement packs an emotional wallop.

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### **Tocotin says**

I found this book to be initially better than the infuriating "Girl with a Pearl Earring", maybe because it tried to present the story from different points of view, but then I got angry because the promise was totally unfulfilled. The characters were unbelievable and flat, as if written with some sort of manual in hand.

There were two girls who became friends despite the differences between their families and personalities, but nothing came out of it, because simply labeling one girl as "shallow & pretty" and the other as "intelligent and plain" couldn't make for developing their characters. Actually I liked the stupid and pretty Lavinia better, she was at least some fun. Maude I can't say anything about for the life of me, and she was the stupider one, what with her being so oblivious about Jenny the servant or Simon or her mum. She only cared about herself. The mothers, the grandmother, the fathers were even worse, one-dimensional tools good only for thinking textbook thoughts about "the spirit of the day", politics, suffrage and such - no character development, no independent thought, just timid agreement to be obvious puppets of the author.

The story was so predictable it was sad. Of course something bad was going to happen during the suffrage rally. Of course the poor boy would fall in love with rich ladies, and think about them lots of gentle stuff. Of course the independent woman would neglect her daughter. Of course all the internal monologues would consist entirely of hypocritical exclamations, declarations and declamations, what with all these persons being, y'know, Victorians and stuff.

So why 2 stars? Because it was a fast read and I like POV changes. But grrr.

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## Melika Khoshnezhad says

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**Stacy says**

Victorians were obsessed with death and sex. This book opens with the death of Queen Victoria, and ends with the death of King Edward, placing it squarely in Edwardian times, but the Victorian obsessions of death and sex are the two themes of this novel, pushing and pulling each other forward to modern times or back towards the Victorian age.

The book follows two rival families sharing adjacent cemetery plots and who eventually become next door neighbors. The two little girls become friends, the fathers play cricket and go to pubs together, but the mothers are constantly comparing themselves to the other in every way.

Through the point of view of all of the different family members, servants, and the gravedigger's son, the nature of the families' friendship and rivalry is uncovered. This style of shifting 1st person narration was very effective for this book. With headings indicate who was writing, it was never confusing, and the plot unfolded itself slowly and beautifully as motivations for past actions others observed became clear.

Death surrounded these families. The girls were just old enough to understand death when Queen Victoria died. They live next door to the cemetery and visit their family plots. They learn how to mourn. They live in the shadow of death every day.

Sex was ever present as well: the wife that turned her husband away; the husband that went to wife swapping parties; sexual escapades with men who work at the graveyard, and the consequences of those actions. Sexual roles were explored as well, as men are told to handle their woman as one handles a horse, and an accidental encounter with a leading suffragette leads one of the wives deep into that movement.

Eventually, the families become too entangled with each other and with the Suffragette movement so that even the smallest things that these rivals and friends do will have unintended and drastic consequences.

This was an excellent novel.

## **Craig Monson says**

Chevalier's second novel shifts from 17th-century Delft to London between the deaths of Queen Victoria and

Edward VII. A lot of the action takes place in a cemetery, much like Highgate, populated by some 30 angel monuments, one of which eventually topples. The title presumably also refers to some of the female characters, who are in the process of abandoning the Victorian pedestals that have kept them somewhat set in stone. The narrative unfolds in a stream of brief, first-person accounts, less like letters (in which writers might choose their words less with "truth" than with ulterior motives in mind) and more like diary entries (supposedly unguarded and spoken "from the heart"—though characters can, and do, lie to themselves). Chevalier observes appropriate class distinctions in putting words in lower class mouths (e.g., those of cooks, housemaids, the youthful gravedigger, or "naughty boy," who becomes chums across class lines with two young girls, habitués of the cemetery, who serve as chief protagonists); from a very early age the precocious Maude and Lavinia, on the other hand, sound little different than their parents.

Maude's mother, the restive Kitty, contrasts notably with Lavinia's mother, Gertrude (much mired in Victorian proprieties), not to mention with Kitty's mother-in-law (a thoroughly unlikable version of Maggie Smith from *Downton Abbey*, without the wit). *Fallen Angels* and its cast perhaps resemble *Upstairs, Downstairs* of blessed memory more than that most recent BBC stately home juggernaut.

One experiences a lot about the Edwardian way of death as all these women (and their less visible husbands and paramours) confront Britain's post-Victorian social growing pains. These include women's suffrage, to which Kitty becomes thoroughly committed. Chevalier also suggests the sorts of unfortunate consequences that can result when various characters remain so unwaveringly faithful to Principle that they forget or ignore "lesser" concerns. Humanity, it seems, is sometime left in this story to those who have little time for and can ill afford such principles.

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### **Susan Roy says**

When I picked the book I was intrigued by the time period and the vehicle of using several characters and their point of view to narrate the story. I read "Girl with the Pearl Earring" which I liked very much and thought the author did a marvelous job researching the period and bringing the time period and the characters were well developed. Based on my past experience with this author I thought I'd give it a try. Unfortunately I was deeply disappointed with this book.

Various characters in the story told short descriptions of events in the story – the descriptions by each character were too short to capture and develop the character and they told so little in each of their sections...I was begging for more detail and information. These brief narrations by the speaker causes the character to be undeveloped, flat, uninteresting and as a reader I was not able to get very involved with the character. I did not find that each character had their own distinctive voice such that without looking at the title of who was speaking I could immediately tell who was speaking. (In fact when the young girls were five they were speaking and thinking about things much too adult and sophisticated for their age so their voices felt believable.)

For most of the beginning of the book the comings and goings and discussions focused around a cemetery –boring. I was more than half way through the book before I saw a glimmer of a plot. At first I thought the plot would center on turn of the century women and unhappy marriage, affairs, unwanted pregnancy, finding a soul mate but that never really developed. As the plot switches away onto something else (women's rights in turn of the century London, women suffragettes) I thought, at last here is the real plot but that was never

really developed either. So much more could have been done to describe the women's suffragette movement, the hardships, the imprisonment of the women and the frustration embarrassment and misunderstanding on the part of the men and society.

I imagine the author did extensive research on the era but that never came out in the story. The rich details, descriptions, of the times and the deep feelings, frustrations, fears and concerns of the characters were not brought out. I found the ending came abruptly but I guess after wondering all over the place the author had to finally just stop.

Overall this book was a big disappointment but I kept reading to the end to see why this book was published ...I thought surely it must have something meaningful to contribute.

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### **Arybo ? says**

Questo libro è triste. Almeno dalla metà in poi. Ruota intorno ad un cimitero, luogo di commemorazione dei defunti. Il romanzo parla, quindi, anche di morte, di mancanza, di dolore. Ho finito di leggere la storia con un groppo in gola, non tanto perché la morte regna sovrana, piuttosto perché è proprio l'aria che si respira che ti fa venire voglia di sussurrare, quasi fossi veramente al cimitero. La morte è qualcosa con cui tutti dobbiamo confrontarci, e questo libro ci mostra come le persone si comportano di fronte alla mancanza ed al lutto.

Ogni personaggio ha una propria voce ed un proprio modo di esprimersi. Conosciamo i loro pensieri e le loro decisioni grazie alla narrazione a più voci. Di questo non posso che ringraziare la scrittura poliglotta della Chevalier, capace di passare da un tono ad un altro, da un modo di parlare ad un altro. Questo è il terzo libro che leggo dell'autrice, ed ogni volta mi stupisco di quanto sia facile per me seguire la sua narrazione. L'idea di un racconto a più voci era presente anche in "Strane creature", un romanzo bellissimo in cui due personaggi raccontano la storia con i loro modi di dire e le loro caratterizzazioni del linguaggio. Anche qui, ad esempio, Simon adotta una lingua diversa da quella di Maude o di Livy, perché proviene da un altro background culturale rispetto a loro. Questa scelta di mutare continuamente i formati linguistici adattandoli ai personaggi rende più veloce il racconto, più ricco e colorito. Inoltre, ci mostra personaggi realistici e ci dà uno spaccato dell'epoca che posso solo immaginare.

Non avevo mai letto niente sul movimento delle Suffragette. Ora sono incuriosita, voglio studiare un po' la faccenda. Ho deciso che quest'anno mi butto sui saggi, perché mi sono stufata di leggere solo narrativa (di qualsiasi tipo, dal fantasy ai contemporanei), e la mia mente agogna informazioni.

### **Libro letto per la All-Over-The-World BookChallenge ↗?, paese: Inghilterra ??**

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### **Dinjolina says**

Hmpf.

Hmpf,hmpf.

This book was a bad try at writing dark.

Well all the books from this author are that, but still!

I had a real problem with the destiny of the main character and her mother.

At least she was the main character to me.

All the others were so horrible you wanted to beat them with a stick!

So, the mother dies. And the girl does not get the boy she wants because of her winy bratty friend that indirectly messed up her and her mothers life.

Go figure.

I just have enough of injustice to look at in real life. Why read about shallow evil people that tend to make life miserable for the marginally good ones?

I gave it the second star because it was not badly written when it comes to form. Just when we consider the plot.

## SARAH says

## **Nasim Dehghan says**

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## **Amy says**

Once again Tracy Chevalier weaves a tale of everyday life in a different time- takes us gently through the customs and mores that define a particular point in history. She also allows her characters to unfold, not from one single point of view or from an omnipotent observer, but each from their own perspective. Through her words, they each grow and evolve- even the most shallow of characters shows surprising depth. The descriptive quality, simple prose, multiple perspectives, all help the story unfold.

This period of English history is not one I know that much about, but I found the customs fascinating. (My knowledge of the suffragette movement in England was for a long time limited to the mother in Mary Poppins). I really feel that I learned a great deal about the customs of the time.

I am perhaps an odd duck, because I really like reading the acknowledgements and afterwards in books. Chevalier made me smile when she wrote in hers:

"The acknowledgements is the only section of a novel that reveals the author's "normal" voice. As a result I always read them looking for clues that will shed light on writers and their working methods and lives, as well as their connections with the real world. I suspect some of them are written in code. Alas, however, there are no hidden meanings in this one-just an everyday voice that wants to express gratitude for help in several forms."

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## **Mary Pellecchia says**

This takes place in Edwardian London, beginning the day after Victoria's death in 1901 and ending with the death of Edward VII in 1910. It concerns how the turn of the 20th Century affects two neighboring families, one of which hearkens back to the Victorian Era and one of which looks ahead to a new time. It especially concerns the incredibly stifling lives of women at the time. The mother in the forward family becomes a suffragette, pushing them forward perhaps a bit faster than they would wish to go. The climactic moment is a fictional account of a real event of the time, a huge demonstration demanding votes for women. It has tragic results for both families--the young girls of each family are especially affected. The novel is told in Spoon River Anthology style, with different characters taking the narrative voice of succeeding chapters, as if the reader were glimpsing into their personal journals. The differing reactions of one character to events deepen your understanding of the character who spoke before, and you piece out the story by taking in all the characters. There was an Upstairs, Downstairs quality as well because she gives a voice to everyone from the dictatorial grandmother to the poor upstairs maid to the barefoot boy who digs graves. It was a bit of a depressing book, but oddly uplifting when you finished seeing the whole picture. I enjoyed the author's "Girl with the Pearl Earring," and I enjoyed this one as well even though it was so different.

Just as a side note: it is incredible to me when I think of it that my own grandmothers were not allowed to vote until well after they became mothers. God bless those suffragettes.

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## **ZaRi says**

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### **Riadiani Marcelita says**

I love how this book exposes so many different aspects of the Victorian lifestyle; from people with high society statuses, to servants and even a gravedigger's son. The fact that the story is told through the eyes of thirteen very different characters makes it even more interesting to read, since I never seemed to get bored with the whole concept of the story.

Through this book I can delve into the past and examine the London lifestyle in the Victorian era that I didn't have much clue about before. I didn't know how difficult life was to women during those years. They didn't have what modern women now take for granted: the freedom of choice, of speech, and of having equality.

This novel is romantic, heart wrenching, tragic, entertaining, and just simply beautifully written. I finished it in less than a week. I cried when Kitty Coleman and Ivy May passed away. I simply couldn't put it down. Praise for Tracy Chevalier. I am a fan.

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### **Pam Jenoff says**

I love everything Chevalier has written but this unique story set in Edwardian London has been a particular, long-time favorite. The story focuses on the friendship of two young girls from different backgrounds and includes several perspectives, including that of a gravedigger's son and an ardent suffragette. A well-researched piece of historical fiction and a gripping story.

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### **Niloofar Masoomi says**

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