



Our Fathers

By Andrew O'Hagan

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Hugh Bawn was a modern hero, a dreamer, a man of the people who revolutionized Scotland's residential development after World War II. Now, as he lies dying in one of his own buildings, his grandson Jamie comes home to watch over him. It is Jamie who tells the story of his family, of three generations of pride and delusion, of nationality and strong drink, of Catholic faith and the end of political idealism. It is a tale of darkness amidst the search for Utopia. A poignant and very powerful reclamation of the past, *Our Fathers* is also a clear-sighted and beautifully crafted look at public and personal history.

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Our Fathers By Andrew O'Hagan Bibliography

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

In literature, at least, most family sagas conform to a fairly simple pattern: rise and fall. Seldom, however, does this narrative arc take so concrete a shape as it does in *Our Fathers*. The hero of Andrew O'Hagan's first novel has spent the postwar era preaching the virtues of modern housing: "Most of the high-rises on the west coast of Scotland were made, or inspired, out of Hugh Bawn's zeal, and his tireless days as a housing boss. A priest of steel decking and concrete was Hugh." Yet the novel is narrated by this master builder's grandson, Jamie, who happens to make his living as an urban demolition expert. More than once he's helped to tear down the very edifices his grandfather erected--setting off both literal and Oedipal explosions in the process.

Now, however, Hugh is on his deathbed, and Jamie has returned to Ayrshire to make peace with the old man. Not surprisingly, he also finds himself reckoning with the shadow of his father--a brutal drunk who managed to alienate three generations of the family in one go. As its title suggests, O'Hagan's novel is primarily a meditation on paternity, which in Scotland, anyway, seems to amount to the kiss of death:

In my father's anger there was something of the nation. Everything torn from the ground; his mind like a rotten field.... Our fathers were made for grief. They were broken-backed. They were sick at heart, weak in the bones. All they wanted was the peace of defeat. They couldn't live in this world. They couldn't stand who they were.

To his credit, Jamie can hardly stand who he is, either: he senses that grief and weakness aren't merely national conditions but human ones. And as Andrew O'Hagan's mouthpiece, he attains some splendid rhetorical heights. Yet his voice gets muffled, and sometimes silenced entirely, by the author's multigenerational ambitions. There are too many Bawns in this novel, too many tales, and too many miserable transactions between father and son. O'Hagan's prose is perhaps worth the price of admission. Yet *Our Fathers*, like the Scots communities that Jamie so explosively reshapes, is itself a victim of excessive sprawl. --James Marcus

From Publishers Weekly

Scottish writer O'Hagan's first book, *The Missing*, was a well-received nonfictional compound of memoir and journalism on the subject of missing persons. Now, switching competently to fiction, he has produced a family melodrama and novel of social consciousness spanning four generations. Jamie Bawn's grandfather, Hugh, better known as "Mr. Housing" from his days as Labour's Public Works mastermind, is dying in a grim flat in one of the many Glasgow high-rises he erected in the name of progress. To Hugh's pride and dismay, Jamie has followed in his footsteps and, after briefly deserting Glasgow for Liverpool, is now assisting with the demolition of his grandfather's buildings, for the good of a new generation. As he nears death, Hugh is under investigation for cutting corners in the construction of his utopian towers, but Jamie knows that though the allegations are true, Hugh intended to pass his savings on to needy tenants. In a bedside vigil lasting many weeks, Jamie devotes himself to his grandfather, their sparring underlaid with prickly affection. Jamie also reminisces about his father, Robert, a crude and abusive drunkard who hated his son, and Hugh's mother, Effie, the family's first idealist, who led rent strikes in Glasgow's tenements during WWI. If Jamie and Hugh are too strong as individuals (and political animals) to reconcile completely, Jamie's watch over Hugh's last days gives him enough perspective to allow him to reestablish contact with his estranged father. O'Hagan's control over the Glaswegian idiom never slips as his characters tentatively get in touch with their feelings in most un-Scottish fashion. Skirting sentimentality and never indulging in it, *Our Fathers* deftly balances generational conflict with political struggles in a hardnosed, reform-minded

Scotland. Author tour. (Oct.)

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From Library Journal

On the heels of his successful first book, the acclaimed nonfiction title *The Missing*, journalist O'Hagan tries his hand at fiction. At the center of this book is Hugh Bawn, an ardent Socialist who planned and built high-rise flats in postwar Scotland. Years later, as he lies dying, his grandson Jamie returns home from England to reclaim the past he has tried unsuccessfully to leave behind. Spun by Jamie, this poignant tale reveals the lives of Hugh, Jamie, and Robert, Jamie's alcoholic father. Hugh's high-rises are destroyed one by one to make room for newer housing, much like the dreams of these three Scottish men. Eventually, Jamie realizes that the "child you have been will never desert you" and that memories may not always offer solace or solutions to present conflicts. A thoughtful book; recommended for large fiction collections. AFaye A.

Chadwell, Univ. of Oregon Libs., Eugene

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Glass:

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Raymond Simmons:

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particular book was represented just how can the world has grown up. The language styles that writer require to explain it is easy to understand. Often the writer made some research when he makes this book. Here is why this book suitable all of you.

Christian Robbins:

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