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Andrew O'Hagan

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First Canadian publication of the powerful debut novel from the author of **Be Near Me**.

Finalist for the Man Booker Prize, the International IMPAC Dublin Literary Award, and the Whitbread Award.

Hugh Bawn was a modern hero, a visionary urban planner, a man of the people who revolutionized Scotland's residential development after the Second World War. But times have changed. Now, as he lies dying in one of his own failed buildings, his grandson Jamie comes home to watch over him. The old man's final months bring Jamie to see what is best and worst in the past that haunts them all, and he sees the fears of his own life unravel in the land that bred 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 dark hearts and modern houses, of three men in search of Utopia. A poignant and powerful reclamation of the past, **Our Fathers** is a deeply felt, beautifully crafted, utterly unforgettable novel.

Our Fathers Details

Date : Published September 25th 2007 by Emblem Editions (first published March 15th 1999)

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Author : Andrew O'Hagan

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From Reader Review Our Fathers for online ebook

Joanne Morton says

So beautifully written

Morgan says

this was set in north ayrshire so i think i should have loved it but hm not really. i feel like he just stuck in every big theme in modern scottish lit through quite boring prose. i also have big feels about how he talks about the place

Justin Evans says

I really liked 'Be Near Me,' and this was truly disappointing. It was lauded by reviewers, and it's easy to see why. It deals seriously with serious themes, and when it's just doing that it's actually very good.

But the style... dear lord in heaven. As we look back on the worst excesses of romantic prose, so shall our grandchildren look back on the worst excesses of 'modernist' prose. And they're all here. Sentences without verbs. They're the subject of the following sentence. Sometimes. No links between phrases, no temporal progression, no clauses. Each verbal unit stands alone. Short and 'powerful.' All this stated in a matter-of-fact manner. No excrescences. A sudden, unexplained torrent of emotion and sentiment is expressed in a nature metaphor. The emotion always grief. The metaphor seems fresh, insightful, stunning. The poetry of it is breathtaking. So are the descriptive passages full of color and life. But this is a lie. Only the sterility of the remaining prose gives this effect. The metaphor and the description are as hackneyed as anything the worst late romantic could erect.

Let us remember the beauty of syntax every now and then, and the benefits of clauses. Perhaps, too, we could take a break from novels of self-pity masquerading as self-criticism- I'm looking at you, Netherlands, and you, Philip Roth.

Linda says

3.5 for this story of three generations of flawed, tormented men. Dian selected this book for book club because of the beautiful writing. I found the story to be frustrating at times and very heartbreaking at other times. I give the story 3 stars, but the writing easily deserves 4 stars.

Buchdokter says

Mitte der 90er kehrt James Bawn nach Ayrshire in Schottland zurück, weil sein Großvater im Sterben liegt. Jamie erinnert sich an seine Kindheit mit einem trinkenden Vater, der die Mutter misshandelte und seinen

Sohn für einen Versager hielt. Dass Bücher laut Robert Bawn nur für Schlappschwänze da sind, hindert Jamie nicht daran, die Schule zu lieben. Besonders verehrt er seine Bio-Lehrerin, die für ihn die beruhigende Vernunft der Naturwissenschaften repräsentiert. Eine der anrührendsten Szenen des Buches ist die Sorge der Lehrerin um James Schicksal, die sich in ihrem Buchgeschenk ausdrückt, als die Bawns von England nach Schottland umziehen. Zu seiner schottischen Kindheit gehörte für Jamie explizit der sexuelle Missbrauch durch den katholischen Priester. Vater Peter Bawn nimmt in Schottland eine Stelle als Koch in einer Sonderschule für Schwererziehbare an. Ein großer Teil der Schüler lebt dort, nachdem sie ihren gewalttätigen, gleichgültigen Eltern immer wieder davonzulaufen versuchten. Jamie und der Heimzögling Berry entdecken ihre Gemeinsamkeit - beide Väter hassen ihre Söhne. Jamies Halt ist allein der Optimismus seiner Mutter, dass er es einmal besser haben wird. Jamie fühlt sich in der Familie für die Beschwichtigung seiner Mutter zuständig, obwohl er insgeheim mit ihrer Duldsamkeit gegenüber dem gewalttätigen Ehemann hadert. Weil seine Mutter ohne den Vater nicht sein konnte, musste Jamie sich so einsam fühlen, erklärte er sich die Misere mit kindlicher Logik. Während seine Mutter unbeirrt der alten Leier anhängt, dass gewalttätige Männer und Väter schuldlos an ihrem Verhalten sind, flüchtet Jamie zu seinen Großeltern. Für Großvater Hugh Bawn, der eine Generation lang schnell hochgezogene Hochhäuser in Glasgow baut, um die Wohnungsnot zu lindern, nimmt Jamie die Stelle des Sohnes, seines verstoßenen Vaters ein. Eine Rückblende führt in die Zeit von Hughs Geburt, als dessen Vater Thomas, der die Landwirtschaft hasste, vom Dorf in die Stadt kam, um in einer Kanonengießerei zu arbeiten. Thomas stirbt im Ersten Weltkrieg in irgendeinem Loch in Flandern. Der kleine Hugh behält als erste Erinnerung an seine Kindheit, wie seine Mutter Jamie einen Aufstand gegen die Zwangsräumung von Kriegerwitwen organisiert, die ihre Miete nicht mehr bezahlen können. Aus dem wissensdurstigen Jungen, der schon mit vier Jahren in die sozialistische Sonntagsschule geht, wird ein Mann, der jeden beeindruckt, der Pionier des sozialen Wohnungsbaus. Anhand der Familiengeschichte der Bawns illustriert Andrew O'Hagan die Übergänge der schottischen Wirtschaftsgeschichte von Landwirtschaft und Bergbau der Jahrhundertwende zu Schiffbau und Fabrikfertigung in der Gegenwart.

Der Verfall des Hochhauses, in dem seine Großeltern leben, und der soziale Abstieg seiner Bewohner ist für James nicht zu übersehen, als er in Glasgow ankommt. Der Wohnblock ist ein Schandfleck, den man nur noch sprengen kann. Niemand ist dem alten Hugh mehr dankbar dafür. Die Wohntürme von heute sind ebenso feuchte Löcher wie die Bruchbuden mit Außenklo damals waren. James nimmt das Ende der Ära Hugh zwar wahr, aber es bleibt offen, ob er seinen eigenen Weg inzwischen gefunden hat.

Fazit

Nach einer meisterhaft erzählten Rückblende in Jamies Kindheit kann der Roman nicht bis zum Schluss fesseln. Jamie, dessen Familiengeschichte als Anknüpfungspunkt zur schottischen Geschichte dient, bleibt dazu als Protagonist zu blass. Meine erste Begegnung mit Andrew O'Hagan als Erzähler fand ich dennoch lohnenswert.

Der Autor

Andrew O'Hagan kam 1968 in Glasgow zur Welt und wuchs wie sein Held Jamie in North Ayrshire auf. Er arbeitete für die London Review of Books, schrieb 1995 *The Missing* (das auf die Shortlist zu drei Literaturpreisen gelangte), 1999 *Our Fathers* (Dunkles Herz, dt. 2000), nominiert u. a. für den Booker Prize und den Whitbread First Novel Award. 2003 erschien *Personality*; und O'Hagan wurde vom Literaturmagazin *Granta* zu den Top 20 Young British Novelists gezählt. 2006 *Be Near Me*, auf der Longlist für den Booker Prize, 2008 *Atlantic Ocean: Essays on Britain and America*. *Leben und Ansichten von Maf dem Hund und seiner Freundin Marilyn Monroe* (2010) ist O'Hagans vierter Roman. Für seine Bücher erhielt er zahlreiche Auszeichnungen und zwei Booker-Prize-Nominierungen. Andrew O'Hagan, der in London lebt, zählt zu den wichtigsten literarischen Autoren Großbritanniens. (Quelle Wikipedia)

Jan says

Not a very cheery tale and not an easy book to read - both in terms of subject matter and writing style.

Miserable people, trapped in miserable lives, and living in sink estates - there seemed to be very little glimmer of hope for anyone here - even Scotland and the Scottish people don't come out in glowing terms.

I wanted to really enjoy this book but there are many better tales of dysfunctional families out there.

Lysergius says

Andrew Hagan is not a writer I am familiar with, so "Our Fathers" came as a welcome surprise. Overall I found it lyrical and moving, evocative and familiar. I found the family dynamics completely credible, and I was impressed by the powerful description of the protagonist's relationship with his father, and his surrogate, his grandfather, and indeed of his relationship with his mother and his grandmother. I would suspect that there are some personal autobiographical details from the author's own history woven into the text.

Finally as someone who spent a lot of his formative years in Scotland I found the descriptions of life in Scotland as drawn by the author convincing and familiar, in all their dreich wind-blown detail.

I think I will put Mr O'Hagan on my list of authors of whom I wish to read more.

Alex says

I think this is a 3.5 more than 4.

Our Fathers takes a really interesting, personal view of the people who shape the world: in this case, municipal housing across Scotland. I'm still forming my thoughts over how the balance was held between love and support of the man, and awareness of the faults, because I put this book down for a week in the middle and might have missed some subtle progression. However, it does feel a bit like a defence of the families of people who have an outsized impact and are just as imperfect, if not more so, than the rest of us, which is a timely conversation in this age of news and connectedness and snap judgements.

Chris Pacilla says

I did not like this book at the beginning. Short staccato prose, no flow, emotionally detached characters. But I was crying at the end. The end features redemption and gain. But still a heavy sense of loss. A dark, quiet, beautiful read. Highly recommended.

James M says

A revolutionary post WW2 architect suffers a slow decline.

S Murdoch says

I can't in honesty rate this book at this stage. I'm a few chapters from the end and I've lost the will to finish it. Started well, halfway through became slightly tedious, two thirds through and I'm beginning to dread the sight of it, avoiding bedtime because there it will be, lying in wait. I guess it's a wee bit like meeting someone you haven't seen for ages - you know you should be interested in what they have to say, it's just taking sooo long! I may never finish it.

Some time down the line, and I have abandoned all hope.

Hayley says

One of the worst books I've ever read. Most (but not all) of it is badly written, overly self-conscious and mind numbingly dull.

Jane says

A story of Glasgow and Ayrshire, of working men and women, their pride, their love and their faults. Ultimately a moving portrayal of the love between grandfather and grandchild. I loved it.

Steven-John Tait says

This book made me buy a lot of Andrew O'Hagan's stuff. The prose flows very well and I find myself flowing through the pages. The story itself might be a little on the dull side, although it's worth a read. The other stuff I've read by O'Hagan other than his essays has been too focused on celebrity, or issues I'm not really interested in. If anyone can recommend one of his books to me give me a shout.

Michele says

Somewhat overwritten I would say and not surprised that this is a first novel , also rather too neatly tied up.

Craig Smillie says

Jamie Bawn returns to Ayrshire to spend the last weeks with his dying grandfather. And to see if he can make sense of his own past. Of a terrifying abusive alcoholic father with a lifestyle as low as the gutter and a grandfather who was a municipal improver with a reputation as towering as the tower blocks he hastily threw

up in the sixties as the new dream of working class living. Jamie struggles to emerge from the wreckage and debris of these lives. O'Hagan's portrayal of the brutal, bullying fathers of the title are painfully, yet humanely constructed, but the character of the narrator remains curiously concealed - part of that phenomenological conundrum where, while we may see clearly what is going on around us, the self remains a mystery. No matter how long we spend gazing into the mirror to find ourselves, the image remains unfamiliar and mysterious. As a result, O'Hagan's language resorts to poetry - and beautiful poetry - as the young man seeks to grasp what cannot be known. The language is often staggeringly beautiful. (e.g. the description of his granny knitting.) (Some may call this "over-writing", but as a Kerouac fan I think that anything that is not "overwritten" is not worth reading. If it's prosaic, I could have done it myself...)

The female characters diminish themselves to almost nothing in order to accommodate the huge, inflated egos of their partners. The granny puts her Scottish Colourist prints and dreams of the possibilities of a bright Modernist world in a cardboard box under her bed. "She rarely goes out." Jamie's mother puts her life on hold and patiently suffers her man's ravings and his fists. Jamie's own partner terminates her pregnancy since he is unsure whether he will make a good father himself. This is the tragedy of Scottish life, where for many men the dream is only of drink and for women that he will come home in a good mood.

But the experience for Jamie is healing and hopeful.

Highly recommended.

Michelle Butterworth says

A poignant read, but utterly boring and overly descriptive in some parts

Sandra says

The first time I read this, presumably fourteen years ago, it failed to match my expectations. This second time, I realise that it was my expectations that were at fault.

Not an easy book, too close for comfort at my age, and thought-provoking, not least reminding me of things undone in my own life, but beautifully written and well-paced, with a quiet weightiness.

Fazackerly Toast says

I thought this was very good. I don't generally like "poetic" writing and I have no interest whatsoever in the provision of public housing in Glasgow in the early twentieth century, but the quality of the writing is such that the author puts you right there and makes you care about people whom you have nothing in common with.

Charles says

As someone who liked O'Hagan's more recent novels very much indeed, I was disappointed by this book. It

had all the flaws of a first novel, I found, overwritten, self-conscious, striving for effect. I don't know how much the book draws, if at all, on the author's life, but it had the feel of being based on material that was still too close to be written about without a sort of sentiment that degraded the emotion the author surely wanted to convey (and if it's pure fiction, there is even less excuse). This is not to say that parts of it aren't very moving indeed, but they tend to be those in which observation rather than fine writing takes the upper hand - the two scenes in pubs stand out. The strengths in the book are those which are foregrounded in O'Hagan's later work, to its benefit. So, worth reading, but, in my view, flawed.
