

**A Demolition Job:  
Scottish Masculinity and the Failure of the Utopian Tower Block  
in David Greig's Play *The Architect*  
and Andrew O'Hagan's Novel *Our Fathers***

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**ABSTRACT:** The post-WWII reconstruction of British cities was partly based, as regards public housing, on a mixture of Socialist Utopian ideals and the example of Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation. In Scotland, this process was also connected with widespread slum clearances resulting, particularly in Glasgow, in serious distortions in the application of Modernist tenets to blue-collar tower blocks. Focusing on two outstanding Scottish literary texts, the play by David Greig *The Architect* (1996) and the novel by Andrew O'Hagan *Our Fathers* (1999), I argue here that the dystopian disaster which many tower blocks became is rooted in the still too invisible patriarchal ideology defended by the paternalistic politicians that built the blocks. By foregrounding the masculinity of their protagonists in contrast to women (as in Greig's play) or younger men (as in O'Hagan's novel), both authors contribute to the Scottish debate on Utopia a gendered critique. This highlights the need to redistribute power when it comes to making decisions about questions that have a high impact on the community. As the texts reveal, so far these decisions have been carried out in the name of a masculinist Utopia which actually lacked the necessary empathy to succeed.

**Introduction: Utopia, the tower block and gender**

In the conclusion to their impressive volume on public housing in Britain, *Tower Block* (1994), Glendinning and Muthesius throw in a word of caution regarding the bandying about of Utopia in the discourse on contemporary architecture. Their "fundamental message" is "a plea, at least to historians, to stand back from the endless clashing of Utopias of housing . . . If it is proper to speak of any kind of 'failure' or 'blame' in respect of Modern housing, then in our view the major 'culprit' must be the polarization of Utopia itself" (327). The title of this final chapter, "Utopia on Trial?" (324-328), alludes directly to the notorious volume by Alice M. Coleman, *Utopia on Trial: Vision and Reality in Planned Housing* (1985), a book that substantiated Margaret Thatcher's attack on Council housing. Thatcher is a good example of the dangers of polarized Utopia: as she dismantled the Socialist Utopia behind public housing, she sold to 1,000,000 new home owners the very homes they rented, invoking the benefits of Utopian liberal capitalism. Thatcher is gone but twenty years after

Glendinning and Muthesius' plea, public architecture seems hardly free of the Utopian polarization they censured. Arguably, architecture simply cannot advance without a permanent search for Utopia.

I wish to examine here the fall into dystopia of the Utopian Modernist tower block, in particular as represented in two outstanding Scottish literary texts: the play by David Greig, *The Architect* (1996) and the novel by Andrew O'Hagan, *Our Fathers* (1999). I offer in the first part an overview of the introduction of the tower block in Britain in order to assess how the Utopia that led to its specific proliferation in Scotland turned ultimately into dystopia, contested with the many demolitions of these blocks. I wish to argue that, as the play and the novel evidence, there is a heavily gendered discourse sustaining the tower block and, definitely, behind its implementation in Scotland. The gender issues are connected to a version of local patriarchy that both Greig and O'Hagan contest as Scottish anti-patriarchal men. The demolition job they offer of the careers of their male protagonists is, at any rate, more thorough in Greig's case. These two texts, thus, are articulated by another branch of Utopia: the search for a more egalitarian, empathetic masculinity in answer, directly or not, to the demands of, possibly, the most potent contemporary Utopia: feminism.

## **1. The Modernist High-Rise and the Tower Block in Scotland: Utopia Revealed as Dystopia**

### **1.1. Le Corbusier's Modernist High-Rise: A Masculinist Utopian Project**

Le Corbusier (1887-1965) occupies necessarily a prominent place in all discussions of the tower block. Not only were his theories and proposals for urban planning based on it, but also the main high-rise he built, the Unité d'habitation (Marseilles, 1947-1952), inspired many British architects working in Council housing. Debate still rages on whether Le Corbusier is the greatest 20<sup>th</sup> century architect or, as journalist Christopher Booker called him in 1987, 'the architect of disaster for the millions who are condemned to live in a concrete jungle.' Le Corbusier is also controversial concerning the gender issues I focus on here. Often described as what I would call a typical patriarchal man—arrogant, self-centered, tyrannical, misogynistic—he has been defended, nonetheless, by many women, including eminent woman architect Flora Samuel. She has even labeled him a feminist, although relative to the context of his times.

Reading Le Corbusier's own writings may help to dispel the vitiated atmosphere surrounding his works, particularly the tower block. In *Toward an Architecture* (1923, *Vers une Architecture*) two segments are of particular interest. In "Mass Production Housing" (253-290) Le Corbusier makes a passionate defense of this concept and practice: "If we wrest from our hearts and minds static conceptions of the house and consider the question from a critical and objective point of view, we will come to the house-tool, the mass-production house that is healthy (morally, too) and beautiful from the aesthetic of the works that accompany our existence" (2007, 261). He proclaims that "[w]e must create a mass-production state of mind" (261) and dismisses the dream of having a unique home of one's own as something that "induces a veritable sentimental hysteria" (262). Le Corbusier developed this idea in the aftermath of the devastating

WWI and this might be a reason why his approach also made sense in the context of post-WWII Britain, when so much new housing was needed as fast as possible. Le Corbusier, though, deliberately excludes the possibility that mass production may be considered ugly, ignoring how uniformity usually begets discontent.

The section “Plan” (115-130) within the larger segment “Three Reminders to Architects” (99-130) is pivotal for the understanding of Le Corbusier’s urban-planning Utopia. Here he criticizes the congestion of American city centers in which too many skyscrapers are set too close to each other. He dreams of an alternative Radiant City, with sixty-storey residential blocks set on wide avenues, all services gathered together, with recreation areas and shops off the ground floor. Most crucially, “[a]t the foot of the towers, parks unroll; greenery extends over the entire city” (2007, 126). His own Marseilles Unité, which still works very efficiently for its residents, is surrounded by parkland, even though possibly the best example of Le Corbusier’s vision is the mixed housing-type estate of Alton West (1959). Built to fit the Richmond Park landscape, this is still today one of the few success stories of the Unité-inspired tower block in Britain.

Despite his prestige, it took Le Corbusier “until 1947—when he was sixty years old— to win a commission to design an ideal block of flats for families bombed out of their homes during World War II” (Glancey 2013). The singular, twelve-storey high Unité, built “after a long struggle with the authorities” (Samuel 2004, 149), is very far from Le Corbusier’s sixty-storey fantasy; its moderate size might be part of its long-lasting success. The Unité’s 337 apartments house 1,600 residents, now mostly middle-class professionals, who enjoy communal facilities both in the basement (like laundry rooms) and the roof top (a running track, a shallow pool, a nursery, solarium, etc). There are shops and even a hotel within the building. Far from being the target of impending demolition, the Unité is since 2006 a candidate to become a UNESCO World Heritage site. In spite of its success, though, only four more Unités have been built: Nantes-Rezé (1955), Berlin-Westend (1957), Briey (1963), and Firminy (1965).

The Unité is partly Le Corbusier’s European answer to the American idea of the phallic skyscraper, “a pinnacle of patriarchal symbology . . . rooted in the masculine mystique of the big, the erect, the forceful—the full balloon of the inflated masculine ego” (Weisman 1981, 1). It is, nonetheless, based on masculinist principles. Its design borrows famously from Catholic all-male monasteries, among them “the Florence Charterhouse, the Carthusian monastery in Tuscany he first visited in 1907” (Glancey 2013). To be fair, he also took inspiration from “the revolutionary communal housing projects designed by Soviet architects in the 1920s” (Glancey). In his third volume in praise of Le Corbusier, Charles Jencks stresses that no matter its original conception, the building feels, rather, like “being on a gigantic ocean liner” (2000, 249). He applauds the Unité’s varied twenty-three types of apartment, but spares no comment for the fact that Le Corbusier centered all of them on the kitchen, from which the housewife was supposed to minister to the needs of the household.

Flora Samuel seizes on this distribution to extol Le Corbusier’s feminist virtues. Concerned by the lost harmony between men and women brought about by the 19<sup>th</sup> century separation of the spheres (much like fellow Modernist and anti-feminist D.H. Lawrence), Le Corbusier conceived the Unité as “a building that would foster a sense of harmonious unity among its inhabitants” (Samuel 2004, 150). Wishing to “to free the housewife from domestic drudgery” (Samuel, 139), he provided it with communal

services which would, in addition, break the potential isolation of the housewives—the roof-top nursery, for instance. Obviously, as Samuels argues, there is a pro-feminine impulse here but it is by no means pro-feminist, as the *Unité* was built with no intention to alter the gender roles in the home.

Samuel is right to protest that the feminist vilification of Le Corbusier's Utopia is "too simplistic to be useful" (xiii). There is, nonetheless, certainly a masculinist undertone in Le Corbusier's urge to build tightly controlled environments, whether they are a whole city or a single house. Barbara Hooper, a representative feminist vilifier, complains that Le Corbusier always identified the primitive with the feminized, the modern with the masculine. This translated into an architecture of the rational straight line, albeit the primitive feminine body that he abjected ultimately broke out of its repression in Le Corbusier's more organic buildings (2002, 62). This is a questionable argument as, then, Antoni Gaudí's fluid, organic style would characterize him as the ultimate pro-feminine (and pro-feminist) architect, which is not the case. I agree, though, that Le Corbusier's proposal of razing Paris city centre to build his Radiant City is a masculinist fantasy to control the uncontrollable, with masculine geometry defeating the feminized body of the diseased city. This may seem far-fetched but when a similar solution was proposed for Glasgow, in the aftermath of WWII, it was based on paternalistic principles defended by male politicians. They assumed that life, particularly that of the working-class slum dwellers, would be best regulated by the straight lines of the Modernist tower block.

I'll keep, though, from Hooper's harsh critique of Le Corbusier's masculinism, the idea that for the sake of Utopia today, we must abandon "fantasies of mastery and control" (74), and any plan that seeks to break away radically from the past, particularly those based on "the volatility of longing and the desire for things impossible" (74). Concerning Samuel's anxiety that she cannot offer definitive proof of Le Corbusier's feminism, she actually offers ample proof of the opposite. Le Corbusier may have worked in very close collaboration with designer and architect Charlotte Perriand. Yet, he preferred for his private life women unrelated to architecture, like his wife Yvonne Gallis. When he built their home, the spacious duplex unit at 24 Rue Nungesser et Coli in Paris, he neglected to include a room of her own. Perhaps Yvonne's very feminine cluttering of the minimalist home that her husband designed is the best proof of her resistance to his patriarchal rule.

## **1.2. The Blue-Collar Residential Tower Block (in Glasgow): A Dystopian Reality**

Multi-storey housing has been for long an essential facet of urban life in Scotland, particularly in Glasgow. There, three to five-storey block of flats, allowed the city to cope with the remarkable population growth brought about by the Industrial Revolution. Initially built for white-collar workers, Glasgow's Victorian tenements, a product of private initiative, "proved adaptable to meeting extraordinary demand and to wide variations of accommodation, topography and awkward junctions" (Robinson 2010, 76). Their blue-collar rental version, mostly built between the 1880s and 1890s, housed conveniently if not quite comfortably masses of newly arrived migrants. Whether covered with the local grey sandstone or the Ayrshire red variety, tenements gave Glasgow its distinctive coloring.

Tenement construction “stagnated significantly between 1890 and 1914” (Robinson, 76) due to a variety of factors that diminished profits for landlords, particularly “rent control dating from the First World War” (76) in blue-collar areas. This stagnation put firmly in the hands of the municipality by the 1920s the responsibility to house suitably the workers at affordable rents, while the private sector devoted its efforts to white-collar workers keen on ownership. The mission of the Glasgow City authorities included “building to lower densities and supplying more generously designed and equipped flats” (76). This, however, proved to be self-defeating because of dramatic overcrowding and the poor maintenance of the original tenements. After World War II, the situation became simply untenable and the city embarked on a indispensable but still disputed slum clearance policy, replacing run-down tenement areas with residential tower block estates.

Council housing was introduced in Britain in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and regulated by a variety of Housing Acts. Modernist tower blocks were by no means the inevitable choice. They had been preceded before WWII by, for example, garden cities inspired by William Morris’s Utopian Socialist principles and the New Towns inspired by the Swedish government’s example (Elwall 2000). Modernism of Le Corbusier-inspired brutalist style, however, became a sign of Britain’s economic regeneration after WWII. Not just residential tower blocks but also schools, transport terminals, shopping and leisure centers and, of course, the Festival of Britain 1951 buildings were made in that style. Unfortunately, as Elwall notes, this brutalist Modernism of concrete and steel became too late the “official architecture of the welfare estate” (2000, 9), when it was being already questioned elsewhere. He attributes part of its local failure in Britain to two main factors. To begin with, the 1950s tower blocks were originally “built with the intention of catering for the growing number of one or two persons households” (41) or small-size families; they were always placed in estates with a diversity of housing types. However, mounting demand in the 1960s from larger-sized families with no access to houses transformed them into traps, particularly when isolated estates with only tower blocks materialized. On the other hand, subsidies for “dwellings of general needs” (41) were tied in 1956 to high-density housing. Logically, this started a race to build very tall blocks as fast as possible which also led to quickly falling standards.

This process reached a climax, earning much public visibility, with the building by the Glasgow Housing Association of the eight Red Road towers (1964-69, Sam Bunton), infamously known to be the tallest family housing in Europe. The alternative tenement improvement schemes, such as those developed after the publication of the Cullingworth Report of 1967, emerged too slowly and too late to halt the Babelian advance of the tower block. Ironically, though, the battle has been ultimately won by the “quiet revolution,” in Peter Robinson’s words, launched between 1968 and 1980 to renew the tenements.

The residential tower block built all over urban Britain by local Councils has had, despite a handful of success stories, a short reign. This started when it was first introduced to Britain with the ten-storey ‘The Lawn’ (1950-51) in Harlow (Essex), and saw early signs of its end in 1979, with the demolition of the Oak and Eldon Gardens towers (built 1958, vacated 1953) in Birkenhead (Ravetz 2001, 187). This first British demolition of a residential tower block apparently followed in the wake of the 1972 demolition of the infamous Pruitt-Igoe housing project in St. Louis, Missouri (Ramroth 2007, 163). Whatever the case may be, since 1979 demolitions of the much reviled

tower blocks have become cherished public spectacles, as the many videos available on the internet attest to.

The glee with which tower block demolitions are greeted in Scotland (and all over Britain) results from the mismatch between the Utopian urban planning style suggested by Le Corbusier and developed by his British followers, and the dystopian reality of life in buildings that simply contravene major local cultural laws regarding community and family-oriented living. Obviously, Le Corbusier, who never built anything in Britain, is not to blame for the poor application of his ideas there.

The story of this process can be followed in Murray and Osley's fascinating anthology *Le Corbusier and Britain* (2009). What emerges from this volume is, in the first place, proof that British hero-worship of Le Corbusier is divided into two very distinct phases. The first one starts with an early interview in 1924, followed in 1927 by the translation of *Vers une Architecture* (a faulty one that made necessary a second version in 2007). Before WWII Le Corbusier was admired in Britain by just a small, though influential, minority of architects and theorists. In the second phase he was turned almost overnight into an idol, particularly because of the Unité. Le Corbusier visited Britain in 1947 to attend the influential Congrès Internationaux de l'Architecture Moderne (CIAM VI) at Bridgwater on the post-war reconstruction of cities; again in 1948, to address the students of the Architectural Association School and, once more, in 1953, to receive official homage: the Royal Gold Medal of the Royal Institute of British Architects.

His influence was quickly extended when his second-generation admirers were placed in positions of public responsibility. The article "Le Corbusier's Unité d'Habitation" (1951) by the London County Council Architect's Department Housing Division, explains how although "[m]ost people with families of any size prefer houses with gardens . . . the possibility of twenty- or thirty-storey blocks, suggested by the Unité (yet reserved for smaller families) mixed with two- or three-storey compact house-with-garden, seems to be the only rational approach to high density planning" (in Murray and Osley 2009, 169). This was the credo followed all over Britain up to the 1970s. By 1987, when the London Hayward Galleria staged a major retrospective exhibition, the idyll was over. Christopher Booker, the *Daily Mail* journalist who called Le Corbusier a disaster, even argued in his 1987 article that the horrific hacking to death of PC Keith Blakelock during the Broadwater Farm estate riot in Tottenham of 1985 was a direct product of the architecture the Swiss master had inspired (in Murray and Osley 2009, 294-297).

In the British deference for the Unité there is a clear lack of confidence in local talent, perhaps even a collective failure of nerve. Hanley (2007, 85) claims that, seeking inspiration, a group of architects employed by Glasgow's Council visited Marseilles in 1947 to study the Unité, a visit corroborated by the website of the Glasgow City Council and perhaps inspired by the Bridgwater CIAM conference. Hanley calls this visit disastrous though it is more correct to claim, as Glendinning, MacInnes and MacKechnis (1996) do, that the real disaster lay in how Scottish Council politicians disseminated a wrong version of Modernism, which carelessly neglected area development to focus too narrowly on the blocks. The authors complain that since the new high-rises looked modern, though they were not at all truly Modernist, Modernism

itself has borne the brunt of popular criticism rather than those responsible for the dreadful new estates.

Claire Strickett (2009) names Glasgow's chief city planner, Sir Robert Bruce, as the main Le Corbusier-inspired danger to Glasgow's integrity. Bruce was City Engineer and Master of Works (1941-1948) and the author of a key document: the *First Planning Report to the Highways and Planning Committee of the Corporation of the City of Glasgow*, or 'Bruce Report' of 1945.<sup>1</sup> This is the man whose own Utopian Modernist dream included the total demolition of Glasgow's town centre to be replaced by a system of tower blocks, differentiated by district and function, and surrounded by a connecting motorway. This "utopia/dystopia was too extreme to be feasible" (2009) yet Bruce did manage to convince the required political majority of the need to demolish large segments of the city, and to implement town planning and public housing schemes that ultimately failed in just a few decades. All in the name of a heady mix of patriarchal paternalism, Socialism and modernity.

The same principles animated David Gibson, an experienced Councillor (1934-49), the chair of the Glasgow Corporation's Housing Committee on Sites and Buildings (1961-64), and a clear inspiration for Andrew O'Hagan's Hugh Bawn. Glendinning and Muthesius devote a whole chapter in *Tower Block* to tracing how this eloquent, rebellious, and fanatical Independent Labour Party man became Glasgow's self-appointed 'Housing Crusader.' Opposing as ineffective the 1957 *Report on the Clearance of Slum Houses, Redevelopment and Overspill*, Gibson was among the politicians that allowed tower blocks to be "thrown haphazardly on gap-sites anywhere in the suburbs" of Glasgow (1994, 220), rather than on carefully chosen sites. A complete control freak but himself pretty much out of political control, Gibson tolerated no opposition. He accelerated building methods to have towers built within months for the sake of achieving records in new mass housing. More crucially, he disregarded official British Green Belt regulations—which were not, anyway, compulsory—leaving no land around Glasgow for outdoor leisure, agriculture or forests, with the excuse that the demand for housing was too high to leave suburban areas unoccupied.

The Glasgow Council failed, in addition, to provide good public transport for the new peripheral estates, which were, besides, very far from being the self-sufficient spaces that Le Corbusier imagined as regards shopping and leisure. Nor did the new estates result in the emergence of cohesive communities, as the old communities 'rescued' from the slums were broken up "irrevocably" (Strickett 2009). To cap all this human disaster, "[b]uilding systems and materials suitable for the sunny south of France soon degraded, or led to terrible problems with damp when employed under Scotland's rainy skies. A lack of funds meant that corners were cut in both design and construction, and the money required to maintain many of the new buildings in a habitable state never materialized" (Strickett 2009). Most dramatically, the tower block fad, Strickett notes, coincided with Glasgow's decline as a post-industrial economy, probably the ultimate source from which the vandalism and criminality associated with Council-sponsored estates emerge.

In tune with current trends, Strickett asks her fellow Glaswegian citizens not to dismiss Le Corbusier's Scottish legacy too quickly, and thus repeat the same mistakes made in the 1960s and 1970s concerning the underserved demolition of so many Victorian tenements. She, typically, sees the blocks as the heritage of the failed Utopian

ideas that inspired them but does not take into account the actual experience of living in the blocks, which none of the architects that designed them shared. There are also other economic factors at stake that make the blocks ruinous in many other senses. Although “[b]y 1972 new buildings of more than ten storeys at height constituted less than 5% of the total being constructed by the public sector” (Bulos and Walker 1988, 40), the impact on working-class life must have been brutal for decades, as there were “more than 200 tower blocks containing almost 21,000 flats in Glasgow alone by 1971” (Abrams and Brown 2010, 56). Even after quite extensive demolition, the Glasgow authorities were just a few years ago still responsible for 250 blocks, with 94,000 flats, “the highest concentration of public-owned housing in Europe” (Crichton, Nicol and Roaf 2005 [2009], 261). Most face demolition now simply because refurbishing them is too expensive; on the other hand, since the 2007 financial crisis, “[f]or low income people in Glasgow there is little chance of ever getting a mortgage in a tower block on a council estate” (261).

Obviously, the residential tower block set for demolition all over Scotland (and Britain) is the one hastily built for the working classes. No fault is usually found<sup>2</sup> with its luxury equivalent, of which there are many outstanding examples all over the world, including the current tallest skyscraper, Burj Dubai, which combines business and residential usage. The complaint that “many women and the elderly became isolated in tower blocks” (Abrams and Brown 2010, 56) is not associated to upper-class high-life in luxury flats, nor indeed to Le Corbusier’s more modest Unité. What may make life a nightmare on a daily basis is not mainly (or only) the juvenile delinquency connected with the blue-collar (Scottish) tower block, perhaps in an exaggerated way. It is rather something as basic as the combined effect of cheap building materials, inadequate maintenance and missing facilities. The list is endless: “unreliable lifts, absence of clothes-washing and drying facilities, the wind noise, lack of amenities for children, poor provision of shops and the social isolation;” also, insufficient insulation for noise and cold, “and dampness rapidly developed, making the homes hard to clean” (Abrams and Brown, 70).

Clearly, few must have really felt at home in this kind of blue-collar tower block, not even those with a previous experience of living in multi-storeyed tenements. Employed adults and school children enjoyed at least the advantage of leaving them for long hours every day. For those confined to their limits—housewives, young children, the unemployed, the elderly, the sick—the tower block must have felt like the very embodiment of dystopian living. The fact that these ghettos were built by Council authorities applying Socialist ideals and not by the greedy landlords that ran the old tenements must have seemed a grim joke. No wonder, then, that so many are celebrating the demolition of their own homes.

## **2. For the Good of the Community: The Judgment of Utopian Architecture in Scottish Literature**

The texts examined in this second section present the tower block from different but complementary perspectives. Because of their generic differences plays and novels are seldom compared, yet, undoubtedly, much is gained by considering together Greig’s



and O'Hagan's works. In David Greig's highly acclaimed play *The Architect* (1996), Leo Black faces a singular demand from Sheena Mackie, a woman resident of the Utopian tower block estate that made his career, Eden Court: she wants him to join the petition to have the place demolished. In Andrew O'Hagan's novel *Our Fathers* a young Scottish architect, Jamie Bawn, employed in demolishing tower blocks in Liverpool, visits his grandfather Hugh, a former City Housing Councillor, to assess his legacy as the man lies dying in one of the blocks he helped to build.

In both texts, Greig and O'Hagan use the tower block as symbol of the type of Scottish patriarchal masculinity they want to see dismantled. Tower block demolitions and the main character's death are connected in a discourse claiming that the masculinist Utopia which shaped Scotland between the 1950s and the 1970s must go. Greig's critique of Leo's patriarchal egotism leads to Leo's suicide when he decides to immolate himself together with his masterpiece. In contrast, O'Hagan's anti-patriarchal critique of Hugh Bawn is more moderate, perhaps because this man is already dying; on balance, O'Hagan justifies Hugh both as a paternalistic politician and as a patriarchal man. Greig does offer hope for communal regeneration through Sheena, whereas O'Hagan is much more uncertain about how to replace Hugh's failed Utopia, limiting himself to underlining the need to reassess it.

I cannot trace here the full history of the tower block's representation in Scottish and British fictions, but I'll mention at least a few significant examples, mostly films and TV productions as few novels or plays deal with the topic. The actually quite successful Alton West estate was the setting chosen by Francois Truffaut to stage his adaptation of dystopian *Fahrenheit 451* (1966). In the same year, the BBC screened Ken Loach's *Cathy Come Home* (co-scripted with Jeremy Sandford), a moving story and a "watershed moment in terms of a fictional film's projecting questions of housing and homelessness into wider public consciousness" (Burke 2007, 180). The tower block first appeared in Scottish fiction as early as 1969, with the first STV soap opera, *High Living*, written by Jack Gerson. This soap, which ran until 1971, is now apparently lost, though the memory of the 200 15-minute episodes "will remain with everyone over 60, who recalls what it was like not only to move home, but to have their high-rise lives played out on TV" (Beacon 2012).

Andrew Burke mentions as outstanding post-Thatcher works centered on the tower block *Ladybird, Ladybird* (Ken Loach 1994), *Nil by Mouth* (Gary Oldman 1997), *All or Nothing* (Mike Leigh 2002) and the TV series *Our Friends in the North* (Cellan Jones, James Urban 1996). He analyses in detail two 21<sup>st</sup> century films, the politically committed *Last Resort* (Pawel Pawlikowski 2000) and *Red Road* (Andrea Arnold 2006). These films reflect how the habitual popular view of the tower block, promoted by the media and politicians, as "the sites of, and symbols for, the major social problems of contemporary Britain (crime, poverty, anti-social behavior)" (2007, 177) actually conceals barely disguised classism, racism and anti-immigrant prejudice. Ironically, in the notable teen horror pic *Attack the Block* (Joe Cornish 2011), only a gang of non-white teens stand between Britain and a horrific alien invasion.

I cannot present here, either, the complete history of the representation of masculinity in Scottish culture. Yet, since I am arguing that Greig's and O'Hagan's discussion of Utopia is gendered and that they connect straightforwardly Scottish

masculinity and architecture, I must consider very briefly how Leo, Jamie and Hugh fit the socio-cultural context they belong to.

Maureen Martin's volume *The Mighty Scot: Nation, Gender, and the Nineteenth-Century Mystique of Scottish Masculinity* (2009) argues that post-Walter Scott Victorianism envisioned Scotland as an essentially masculine land, particularly the Highlands. Scotland came to be narrated, not without contradictions, as "Britain's masculine heartland" (3), by no means as a feminized colony but much coveted brawn to England's Imperial brain. She, however, sees "Scotland's permanent subaltern status within Britain . . . as a constant humiliation<sup>3</sup> that put Lowland masculinity under considerable stress" (9) throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Using R.W. Connell's controversial concept of 'hegemonic masculinity,' currently under deep revision (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005) Berthold Schoene has argued that still today "Scottish masculinity would not normally be described as 'hegemonic', but rather as a 'marginalized' or 'subordinate', or perhaps all too frequently 'complicitous,' kind of masculinity" (2002, 93). The nagging realization that Scottish men cannot be hegemonic results in a split, reflected in local cultural representations, between the proud 'hard man' (heavily questioned in post-devolution times) and the self-defeating 'soft man.' Neither wants to be complicit with British or English masculinity but they react to their subordination from opposite positions.

The 'hard man' typical of Scottish Literature is a "dysfunctional urban male," usually working-class, occasionally lower middle-class, often unemployed, a "victim of injustice and discrimination on a class basis" (Whyte 1998, 274). Outstanding examples, like William McIlvanney's protagonists and Ian Rankin's Edinburgh detective John Rebus,<sup>4</sup> show how in a context of political dependence Scottish culture responds by celebrating (heroic) failure—Scottish men could have succeeded in being proper hegemonic men if only the circumstances of the nation had been different. The hard man's "status as victim and loser makes him the focus of a surprising but persistent pathos, a pathos that oddly 'feminizes' a figure who wants to be so resolutely and absolutely masculine" (Whyte, 274). This 'feminization' is the root of a singular condition. The 'hard man' is, despite his victimhood, the yardstick by which 'authentic' Scottish masculinity is measured. Yet, his main literary legacy is "a self-doubting masculinity, one which perceived itself as flawed, as lacking affirmation or validation" (279).

A recurrent doubt about the public and private performance of men dominates, then, the fictional representation of Scottish masculinity, with characters divided, in principle, into 'soft men' who question themselves (Jamie) and 'hard men' who refuse to do so (Leo, Hugh). The common denominator here is how both Leo and Hugh, who feel secure in their performance as men, are ultimately exposed as failures, whereas Jamie, who sees himself as a failure, has no fear of exposure. When Leo Black's apparently secure world crumbles, he acknowledges his failure by committing suicide. Hugh refuses to face his errors but not even Jamie's admiration can conceal how deeply flawed Hugh's public and private behavior was. In both cases, when Leo and Hugh die part of Scottish patriarchy dies with them, but also of Utopia.

## 2.1. Down with the Sinking Ship: Self-Sacrifice in David Greig's *The Architect*

The identification of the architect with masculinity has a long history. Sanders highlights in it the novel by American writer Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (1952), which capitalizes “on the popular cultural perception that authors of buildings, like the structures they design, embody the very essence of manhood” (1996, 11). Rand’s manly Howard Roark could not be more different from Leo Black. Yet both her novel and *The Architect* “ultimately reveal architecture and masculinity to be mutually reinforcing ideologies, each invoking the other to naturalize and to uphold its particular claims and intentions” (11). To avoid confusions and accusations of misandry I’ll clarify that the ideology in question is not ‘masculinity’ but ‘patriarchy’: the masculinist arrangement of society based on demanding from hegemonic men that they wield as much power as possible and from women and subordinate masculinities that they comply. Masculinity, and men, can certainly be anti-patriarchal, as Greig’s example shows.

The action of *The Architect* is framed by “[t]he sound of a crowd cheering and clapping” (201) as a tower block is demolished. Neither at the beginning of the play nor at the end, are we supposed to see the demolition. The missing image highlights even more effectively the horror of Leo Black’s suicide, as every member of the theatre audience can imagine it. Nesteruk’s study of two plays within Greig’s amazingly prolific output,<sup>5</sup> the children’s play *Petra* (1992) and *Europe* (1995), calls attention to the important role in them of sacrificial ritual. Without claiming that *The Architect* is exactly about that, I would stress the implicit sense in which audiences, particularly the original Scottish ones, are asked to celebrate Leo’s death as a cleansing ritual which eliminates simultaneously building and architect, dystopia and Utopia. Leo is not literally sacrificed by the community but he is, still, pushed by a combination of forces—his declining professional success, his disastrous family life, Sheena’s protest—into a terminal situation. His death, as Blattès (2008) notes, is complemented by the suicide of two other men, both residents of Eden Court: Sheena’s son Eliot (dead before the play begins), and Billy, the working-class lover that Leo’s son, Martin, abandons. That these three men die by jumping off or into Leo’s phallic tower block is an essential part of Greig’s anti-patriarchal statement.

An aspect that may affect the credibility of *The Architect* is its indeterminate location, perhaps justified because Eden Court is meant to stand for any Scottish estate. The internal chronology of the play, set in 1991, suggests that Leo, then in his fifties, is too young to have been in charge of designing a estate in 1971. Real-life architects responsible for infamous places—Sam Bunton of Red Road estate fame, or Basil Spence,<sup>6</sup> responsible for Hutchensontown C—were born decades earlier. They also enjoyed long-lasting success, quite unlike Leo’s failing career. When the play opens he is building a parking lot for a new office tower block. As the employee of a large architectural firm, a frustrated Leo dreams of “setting up on my own” (101) to develop small projects because “I want to get back to ... a certain control” (101, original ellipsis). This wish to ‘get back’ to a previous stage in which he supposedly controlled his life also haunts Leo as a family man. His wife Paulina, a cold, embittered housewife obsessed by environmental poisoning, finally rejects him because she has “[n]o admiration for him” (172). As a father, Leo is completely unable to connect with his drifting gay son Martin. He spoils his relationship with his supportive daughter (and secretary) Dorothy by not facing his incestuous desire for her.

Sheena Mackie, “the tenants’ representative” (104) from Eden Court, wants Leo to sign the petition to demolish the flats convinced that this way the Council will be embarrassed into building “proper houses” (106). She declares “[i]t’s nothing personal” (106), but Leo feels, logically, offended and refuses to sign. The flats are beset by the usual problems: excessive cold, broken-down lifts, an infestation of cockroaches. Leo still defends his design, just acknowledging that money was too scarce at the time the estate was built. Sheena insists, when Leo claims that the Council has accepted his refurbishment proposal, that the tenants want neither the flats refurbished nor an apology. In her view, she is offering the adamant Leo “a chance to make things right” (108).

Stung by Sheena’s demand, Leo lashes out before an increasingly disloyal Paulina: “Place is a slum, blame the architect. They fill a place with pigs and then complain it’s turned into a pigsty” (122). He may have a point but his use of the word ‘pigs’ unveils the classism of the Socialist Utopia sustaining tower-block estates in Scotland. Later, Leo partly recants, recalling the unique chance to build a “better thing” (192) and how he imagined the “whole estate a village” (193), connected to others and to the city centre. In Leo’s haughty professional view, the materiality of the building is placed above the very people whom it should serve—the problem in the end is how “the human element . . . eludes you” (192). It is nonetheless important to observe that Leo is not responsible for Eden Court’s main drawback: its isolation, even ghettoisation. As Blattès notes, “la tour n’est pas en soi bonne ou mauvaise, ce qui compte c’est le rapport entre la tour et la ville. Sheena et les habitants de la tour ne sont plus intégrés dans la vie de la ville; la tour est devenue un moyen d’exclusion ” (2008, 31).

In the second act Sheena visits Leo’s comfortable middle-class home, where they contemplate together a model of Eden Court. The original design consisted of six towers with “[a]erial walkways linking each tower, platforms linking each balcony . . . loosely based on Stonehenge” (164). Leo won an award and professional recognition but Sheena only cares that the green grass of the model is in reality brown mud and that the residents are sick with depression. Leo defends himself claiming he put much effort and “imagination” (165) in the cheap homes he was commissioned to build. Increasingly annoyed, he practically quotes Le Corbusier when he stresses that “[y]ou can’t build mass housing to suit individual desires” (165). The persistent Sheena accuses next Leo of negligence in his supervision of the hasty construction process. The brochure that convinced her to sign up lied about the stark reality: “Boxes piled on top of each other and we’re stuffed in them like exhibits” (167). Echoing Leo’s wish to regain control, Sheena closes her visit proclaiming that “[a]rchitecture’s for the people who pay. Always. All we want is take control.” (167)

During Leo’s overdue visit to Eden Court Sheena finally convinces him to join the petition. Leo’s change of mind is partly brought about by her revelations about her depressive son’s suicide; also by a significant exchange during which Sheena finishes off the process of Leo’s patriarchal disempowerment. When he repeats his argument that new housing will not solve old social problems, Sheena replies that “The point is control. Who has the power to knock down and who has the power to build” (189). Later, once he’s signed, she delivers the final blow to Leo’s patriarchal pride: “I’ve been working on the new designs. It’s a woman, the person we’re working with. You maybe know her. She does community architecture” (197). Sheena even daydreams about becoming an architect herself and working with Leo. No wonder he decides then to ask

her for the keys to her empty flat, with the lame excuse that he needs to supervise the blasting.

The American film adaptation of *The Architect* (scripted and directed by Mark Tauber, 2006) replaces Leo's suicide with a rosy scene of reconciliation as Leo comes across Martin at the roof top of a condemned tower block. The father is mourning in advance his dying building, the son the suicide of his lover Shawn, a prostitute. This sentimental reconciliation indirectly makes a point about the different approaches to masculinity in Scotland and the USA. Whereas for Greig Leo's failed patriarchal masculinity is doomed, for Tauber there is still a chance for regeneration, also beyond the family. Tauber combines the play's original class background with race issues. The estate that Leo (Waters, not Black) has built, supposedly in Chicago, is inhabited by blue-collar African-Americans. Sheena is in the film community organizer Tonya Neely. She faces a harder struggle as not only Leo opposes her plans but also the local gangs in control of the estate's drug market. Tauber lacks in the end the energy to stage a triangular confrontation between Leo, Tonya and the gangs and simply lets the story fizzle out. The town authorities co-opt Tonya's campaign for political gains and decree the demolition even before Leo signs the petition.

Perhaps *The Architect* is the typical case in which the messenger is unfairly killed. It reflects very well, though, the unappeased necessity to put names and faces to the men who built the tower blocks. They still remain too securely protected, whether dead or live, by their middle-class worlds of professional prestige. On the other, Greig's play also makes good use of sacrificial fantasies, questioning their use. No architect is known to have gone down with their building<sup>7</sup> and, if closely considered, Leo's death is quite preposterous. It is also double-edged regarding the satisfaction that the community may gain from it, for it is at once a surrender and an act of defiance (now *you* feel guilty). Blattès is right to emphasize that Leo must take responsibility for his actions and help others regenerate the city (2008, 31). Oddly enough, she alleges that, as the community leader of this regeneration, Sheena's "chances de réussite sont minces" (31). If Blattès refers to the potential hostility of Council authorities to replace tower blocks with houses, then she's wrong, as this is the solution most Britons prefer.<sup>8</sup>

Whether men or women, Scotland (and Britain) need a generation of sensible and sensitive architects and town planners that see beyond theories and fads to truly care for those they build for. Greig's choice to side with Sheena and against Leo suggests very clearly that women can force major changes in policies so far led by insensitive patriarchal men focused on narcissistic career advance. This is why, once Sheena has empowered herself, Leo must leave the stage. And go down with his sinking building.

## **2.2. A Hesitant Vindication of Terminal Patriarchal Utopia: The Generational Gaps in *Our Fathers***

Coinciding with the release of *Our Fathers*, Andrew O'Hagan published in *The Guardian* the companion piece "Higher Hopes" (March 1999), a compendium of the (rather unoriginal) ideas behind the novel. Tower blocks, he writes, were intended to be "places that would harness the best of community, and improve it ." He celebrates David Gibson among the idealists who found in the high-rise the best solution to the

problem of Britain's post-WW II modernization. In the 1950s all wanted to abandon "the overcrowded back courts and alleyways, the whole panoply of windowless Britain" for flats high up in the sun. Working-class demand was too high for Councillors to cope with as people "cried out for demolition of the slums." O'Hagan also recalls the children's excitement about the tower blocks, which "lived in our heads with Scalextric and Lego and *Space 1999*" and were inhabited by people "proud of where they lived." He openly declares that he loves "the ideal they were built to serve." Sadly, he must also hate them, for being built "with too little thought of how people would actually live in them." As he commiserates, "[m]emory and Utopianism and vanity and soft corruption and hard drink" have finally demolished the idealized towers.

O'Hagan apparently had always wanted to write a novel about the tower block, which is why he visited many all over Britain. The choices open to him were many, including, obviously, narrating the life of the resident individuals and families. His article includes, surely inadvertently, the plot summary of the novel O'Hagan eschewed: the story of how his grandmother ended up living alone on a twelve-storey tower block. Her Roystonhill flat was "the clean new world" and she is remembered happy in it. Towards the end, though, "[h]er world had shrunk to a whitened kitchen" as the lifts no longer worked, some boy snatched her bag and she felt unsafe. An older O'Hagan noticed then that "the wind whistled through the block. There were no shops. No taxis." His granny felt "she'd progressed" but as her death approached, O'Hagan suspected she was lying perhaps even to herself. This is his unwritten novel, the nonexistent *Our Mothers*.

*Our Fathers* is set in the Autumn of 1995, when Jamie, then 35, returns to Ayrshire, after a ten-year absence, in answer to a letter from his grandfather Hugh. Jamie wants to "take a stand against Hugh's delusions" (221) but instead he is seduced by the dying man's account of his own life. Jamie finally grows up thanks to this last chance to declare his love and gratitude to Hugh, as he gave him a life way from his abusive, alcoholic father Robert. This first-person narrative is, essentially, a sentimental bildungsroman in which the protracted reconciliation between the estranged grandson and grandfather dominates their discrepancies on urban planning. In Scottish literary terms, the differences separating Hugh and Jamie recall the contrast between William McIlvanney's social idealism and James Kelman's "defeatism" (Hames 2007, 68), although Jamie's despondency is very mild in comparison to that of Kelman's lost men.

Gasiorek sees a crucial "dissonance" in *Our Fathers* "between a disappointed, patricidal present and an over-optimistic utopian past, while insisting that the latter cannot be simply obliterated" (2005, 44). My concern is that the patricidal impulse is too moderate because Hugh commands too much respect. Jamie is too close emotionally, he condones too much. We simply lack the necessary distance to determine whether Hugh is, as we suspect, a corrupt politician or, as Jamie hints, an honorable man who did his best. Greig understood that Sheena is necessary for us to judge Leo freely, as for her this judgment is not personal. This enables her to argue her points in the play with determination and without sentimentalism. O'Hagan's choice, in contrast, embarrasses the reader, for who can condemn a dying man? Jamie cannot do it, so how can we? In the end, Hugh's "uncompromising stand" is not undermined by "Jamie's equally intransigent revolt" (Gasiorek 2005, 44) because his intransigence is not strong enough.

Jamie's hesitant intransigence is partly conditioned by the unusual generational pattern of the novel, which presents not one but several gaps as it spans four generations of men: Jamie, his father Robert, his grandfather Hugh and his dead great-grandfather Thomas. Whereas the relationship between father and son is often represented in fiction as direct confrontation (this is the case between Jamie and Robert), relationships between grandfathers and grandsons tend to be complicituous rather than confrontational. A turning point in *Our Fathers* happens when Jamie's self-deluded mother allows herself to be beaten up beyond the endurable by a raging Robert. Disgusted, Jamie, then 13, punches his father. Similar violence against Hugh is never an option. Jamie may have left Scotland to escape Hugh when he was old enough to understand how hard-headed and hard-hearted his grandfather is, and to choose his own career. But how can he attack, if only verbally, a fragile, old man in his deathbed?

Fatherhood, given the title of the novel, occupies, logically, a good deal of its substance. Jamie not only "embodies" (Danciu 2008, 242) the "identity heritage" (243) shaped by the men in his family but must also face a decisive choice about passing it on as a father. His fear of being an abuser like Robert has put him off fatherhood to the point that he has forced his patient girlfriend Karen to have an abortion. To his surprise, he finds himself declaring to his grandmother Margaret that "I would like to have kids one day"; when she, sensing what worries him, sentences "you're a good man," his answer is "[n]ot yet" (177). Hugh's death and, above all, Jamie's partial reconciliation with Robert, set him on the right path.

Initially, Jamie presents Robert's alcoholism and misogynistic violence as symptoms of a male Scottish *malaise*: "My father bore all that dread that came with the soil—unable to rise, or rise again, and slow to see power in his own hands. They were sick at heart, weak in the bones. All they wanted was the peace of defeat" (8). When Jamie finally meets Robert at the end of the novel—recycled into a taxi driver, separated from his wife, who has happily re-married—Robert's own diagnosis narrows down onto the key factor, Hugh's disappointed fatherhood:

'I was never the son my da wanted. He wanted somebody he could mould—he wanted you. Your granda was a dreaming man. He needed people that could believe in his goals. I was no good for that. Maybe not good for much. But I didn't hate the man. You'd be better saying I hated myself' (264).

Hugh gets Jamie for him to mould when the boy seeks refuge with him and Margaret after punching his father. Hugh's bad parenting of Robert leads strangely enough to his having a second chance with Jamie.

This is when Utopian architecture and masculinity are inextricably mixed as teen Jamie's new haven is Hugh and Margaret's flat on the eighteenth floor of a twenty-four story high-rise on the coast, Annick Water. This is part of a six-block estate: "[t]op of their line in their day. Each was built in a month and a half" (67). Hugh, an emotional vampire, drinks in Jamie's admiration: "We became separate selves of one another. He told me over and over again how I was his younger self" (31). That this alliance is forged by 1973, when Hugh's power as "[h]ousing supremo" is waning (31), goes then unnoticed by Jamie. Selfishly, Hugh turns Jamie into "his project" (51): "All the secrets

of Scottish housing came to me first hand,” particularly “the tale of our family’s bid for Utopia.” (51)

Hugh spins the final version over the two months of Jamie’s visit, as he lies bedridden dying of lung cancer. Jamie soon sees that ‘Mr. Housing,’ the Chairman of the Public Works Committee, and not grandfather Hugh is speaking. Not even facing death does Hugh “open up” and “turn his back on the public man” (83) for, in his hard man’s words, “[t]here’s no point in self pity” (83). Jamie assumes with some reluctance his role as impersonal listener, telling us that Hugh speaks “forever dismissive of a world less attractive than himself” (81). Jamie also reports how, for all his Socialism, Hugh was “[t]owards the end . . . ravenous for status” (162). His reputation is ruined for, as Margaret discloses, Hugh has been indicted and might be tried for “misappropriating money” (135). When Jamie overhears a reporter hint that embezzler Hugh even used asbestos-infested materials, O’Hagan passes sentence through him: “Hugh Bawn was an idealist. . . . He priced his blocks too cheap. He built more houses with what they saved. His mistakes were better than your truths” (214). One wonders what Sheena would tell Jamie about Hugh’s idealism.

Jamie flatters himself that Hugh has called him back out of love. In their last outing together, though, it transpires that Hugh, well aware of Jamie’s professional activities demolishing tower blocks (his job in the five previous years), wants to persuade him to preserve the buildings: “I might know something about how to make the high-rises more durable” (154). When Jamie adamantly declares that this is a “new time” calling for different solutions, Hugh retorts that he and his “cronies” will need “more than a demolition ball and dynamite sticks” (171) to create something worthwhile out of the rubble—in which he is right. Actually, O’Hagan never really clarifies the circumstances that led Jamie to accept his job. Later in the novel, Jamie attends the demolition in the Gorbals Florence Square of a block commissioned by Hugh, built in 1972. He refuses, nonetheless, to help Hugh’s disciple Fergus McCluskey to supervise the complicated demolition out of loyalty for his grandfather. Curiously, instead of Jamie’s narrative voice O’Hagan uses a fake newspaper article to report the demolition. The voice we hear is not his but that of a resident, a Mrs. Moira McPhail, for whom (echoing Sheena) tower blocks “should never have been built in the first place” (188). This is an opinion that Jamie dares not express.

Neither narrator nor author are fully aware of how the Utopian discourse that Hugh defends is couched in gendered terms, nor how this is distorted to minimize the role of women and its impact on them. This is evident in the treatment given to the couple formed by great-grandparents Thomas and Famie. Thomas, an ineffectual Irish farmer, migrated with Famie and baby Hugh to Glasgow’s Govan in 1914. There Thomas almost became an alcoholic in despair at his chronic failure as breadwinner, finding his way out only in World War I. As his young widow Famie eventually learns from another soldier, Thomas was executed as a deserter, though for whatever reason the British Government pretends he died in combat. This ‘dishonor’, however, does not taint Thomas’s reputation as a mythical ideal for ‘soft man’ Jamie: “As a growing boy I dreamed of Thomas. I wanted to be that kindly man, who had wandered the fields, and loved his wife, and named the flowers, and wrote them lines by the burn” (90). This longing is as hard to explain as Jamie’s neglect of the one truly heroic member of his family: Famie.



Jamie does write that Hugh lived “in the shadow of Famie’s ideals” (96) but she never receives the attention she deserves—her story remains yet another unwritten novel, or part of the imaginary *Our Mothers*. First as the wife of an absent soldier, next as his widow, shy Famie Bawn suffers the abuse of merciless slum landlords. This unprotected woman chooses then to become a fighter for social justice. The 1915 massive evictions turn Famie into public campaigner Effie Bawn, who distinguishes herself for organizing women of all classes into action. A turning point in her career comes with the “rent-strikers’ march on George Square” (100), which results in Lloyd George’s Rent Restrictions Bill. Effie is subsequently elected a Glasgow Councillor in 1918 for the Labour Party and given responsibility for Health and Housing. Essentially, O’Hagan borrows for Effie the career of Mary Barbour, the first Labour woman Councillor, even describing Effie’s activism as the “stuff of Mary Barbour’s heart” (98). Effie, despite her feats, is not, however, Hugh’s main childhood hero—these are men. Hugh worships John Wheatley (1869-1930), a miner turned Socialist politician and appointed Minister of Health in Ramsey MacDonald’s 1924 Cabinet, and John McLean (1879-1923), a Marxist teacher and organizer, and first Bolshevik consul in Scotland.

O’Hagan does not credit to Effie but to Socialist Sunday school Hugh’s boyhood dream of a “Scotland of turbines and giant engines” (105), and she is soon forgotten. Hugh starts working on building sites aged 15 and consolidates his political activism with a first appointment in 1938 as Corporation Advisor on Building Contracts and Materials. His career’s take off coincides with his marriage to meek Margaret, whom he meets in 1939. She contributes to Hugh’s life her unwavering loyalty and her Highland prestige, as her family are “gentle people” (113). Effie dies in 1941, Robert is born in 1943, thus completing Hugh’s transformation from son to father.

Hugh is not drafted during WWII because of a minor ear condition but, as Jamie reports, the war years “made a tough politician” (117) of him, by then already Councillor. Hugh’s peak decade are the 1950s, which he spends “clearing spaces for prefabs” (118), his chosen motto being “The maximum number of houses in the shortest possible time” (117). In the 1960s, besotted by the idea of the tower block, Hugh becomes the head of “the high-buildings programme in Glasgow” (119), “the guiding light” (119) of the men who actually build them. Provincial Hugh, who never travels outside Scotland, borrows in the name of progress not just, as Jamie notes, Le Corbusier’s ideals but also those implemented in Berlin, Chicago and Copenhagen.

These dreams, however, collapse in the mid-1970s, forcing Hugh’s retirement. Jamie, who used to visit as a child Hugh’s building sites, recalls a quarrel with an architect. The man, who could have been Greig’s Leo, complains that poor materials make it impossible to fulfill the required standards. Hugh shouts him down: “We are building good fucking flats. Great flats. For cheap if we can” (124). Unlike what his detractors believe, personal enrichment never motivates Hugh, but “the great Labour victory over Scotland’s housing problems” (125). This turns out to be just a Pyrrhic victory, the tower blocks nothing but a temporary solution. As he lies dying, Hugh still denies the failure of his Utopian dream but this becomes a very direct source of humiliation when he must accept being transferred to a hospital to die because the lifts in his block cannot carry a coffin.

Failed Utopian dreams carry Hugh to his grave but dystopian reality continues for his widow Margaret; whether narrator and author care is another matter. Despite

O'Hagan's vivid memories of his grandmother, Jamie spares no time to consider how Margaret will survive alone up on the eighteenth floor. After Hugh's death she plays the role of his informal executor, passing her husband's legacy literally on to Jamie when she asks her grandson to take all of Hugh's papers. In tears but with a strong voice, she lets go of his company: "Away you go, and believe in things. And live" (280). Earlier in the novel, Jamie does notice that Margaret's is a world of ghosts, as she is "without living friends" (176). That he fails to recall this when her loneliness is completed by Hugh's death shows Jamie's emotional deficiencies but also, above all, O'Hagan's neglect of Margaret.

The portrait of Scottish women in the fictions by men tends to be split between "the helpmate, meek and supportive" and the "embittered, distant woman who denies men the care and nurturing she is expected to provide" (Whyte 1998, 274). O'Hagan's Margaret in an example for the former, Greig's Paulina of the latter. What makes the difference is, seemingly, a traditional patriarchal tenet by which men may keep a woman's love only if she admires him. Paulina loses as she ages her admiration for Leo, hence her love. Margaret is, as Jamie knows, "a casualty of the great improvers" and, for Hugh, in particular, a "prop in the fantasy of his own spotlessness" (180). Rather than ask Margaret directly how she feels, Jamie informs us that "[t]o say that Margaret was held back and stifled . . . would be to say something against her wishes," for she "was quite sure of her husband's gifts, and certain in the role she had sought and maintained, as his partner, his defender" (180).

This may be speculation, but ultimately, a woman like Sheena with her plans to replace tower blocks for houses would afford Margaret better protection than selfish Jamie. For him Margaret's loneliness is not an issue. Nor is it for O'Hagan who leaves this ageing princess locked up in the tower with no knight in shiny armor to rescue her, nor the chance to rescue herself (as Jamie did). Hugh, who should have been that knight turns out to be, actually, the villain who imprisoned her. In this way Margaret Bawn becomes ultimately a symbol of the dystopian ills that patriarchal men like Hugh, no matter how well intentioned in their paternalism, generate with their narcissistic Utopias. This is neither for Jamie nor for O'Hagan the main concern—what a missed opportunity to tell a tale untold.

### **Conclusions: Good Riddance to Them All**

In this article I have analyzed David Greig's play *The Architect* and Andrew O'Hagan's novel *Our Fathers* as outstanding literary examples of the representation of the tower block in Scottish culture. Each text examines the Socialist Utopia that led to the construction of blue-collar estates all over Britain and, specifically in Scotland, as the product of a failed paternalistic, patriarchal project to modernize the nation. In order to better understand and assess play and novel I have considered in the first part of the article the original ideas of Le Corbusier on which the expansion of the tower block was based in Britain; also, the particular dissemination of these ideas in Scotland. As I hope I have proved, Greig's play and O'Hagan's novels not only show the authors' awareness of the key issues raised in the debates on the tower block but also make

important contributions to the still ongoing debate about the Utopian ideas that generated its blue-collar variant.

I have no doubt that, whether the authors intended this or not, *The Architect* and *Our Fathers*, highlight the fact that both the ideas and the implementation of this Utopia were gendered, as patriarchal *men* shaped the buildings that became in the end a dystopian nightmare. Clearly, Greig's critique of patriarchy, articulated through a female character, is more direct than O'Hagan's, whose novel suffers from an excessive sentimentalism that confuses the judgment passed on Hugh Bawn. O'Hagan offers two fascinating female characters, Effie and Margaret, but bypasses the chance to offer to us their testimony. I believe that fair judgment on the British blue-collar tower block and the men who built them cannot be passed without taking into account women like Margaret and, naturally, the lives of all women and men who have lived in the estates now being dismantled.

As happens with all dystopias, there must be some positive aspect that can be salvaged from demolition, and places like Alton West surely hold clues for improving public housing that must be carefully studied. It is possibly a wise decision to pull down the buildings that have made people unhappy and to abandon a style of urban planning that has revealed itself nefarious. Yet, as demolition experts know, all demolition jobs require a high degree of care and safety so that no collateral damage happens. This can be provided, I hope, by the many stories that remain untold including those who might act as powerful counterarguments to my thesis here, namely, the story of how women architects or town planners worked in complicity with the men. Alison Smithson (1928-1993) is the first name that comes to mind.

Wealthy people still chose to live in tower blocks. The collapse of the blue-collar tower block as Utopian project shows, then, that, as usual, what kills Utopia is not the lack of ideals but the lack of funds. Leo and Hugh are, like their counterparts in real life, guilty of ignoring their economic reality for the sake of their ambitions; guilty, above all, of ignoring the personal suffering their buildings cause. The horror we feel comes from the realization that too many men in positions of power lacked the empathy to imagine beforehand that suffering. The lesson we learn but forget too often, then, is that, as Sheena demands in Greig's play, Utopia can never come from above and must always be the result of collective consent.

### Notes

1. See also 'Best Laid Schemes', a website devoted to Glasgow's development (and the segment on the 'Bruce report' in it, <http://www.bestlaidchemes.com/essays/bruce/index.html>); and 'The Glasgow Story' at <http://www.theglasgowstory.com/storyf.php>. Bruce's ideas are also the object of the short documentary film, "Glasgow Today and Tomorrow - Glasgow Corporation's plans from 1949 for the redevelopment of Glasgow," available from <http://scotlandonscreen.org.uk/database/record.php?usi=007-000-000-331-C> (Accessed August 2013).

2. J.G. Ballard's novel *High Rise* (1974) does criticize the luxury high-rise, presenting, as it was habitual in the author, its initially well-balanced community of dwellers as prey to the isolating qualities of their environment, which soon degenerates into out-of-control entropy and eventually sheer chaos.

3. This humiliation is possibly best represented in recent Scottish fiction by the famous scene in *Trainspotting* (1994 novel Irvine Welsh, 1996 film Danny Boyle) in which Edinburgh junkie Renton raves in the middle of the Scottish hills about the status of colonized Scots as ‘the lowest of the low.’ Arguably, the whole march towards independence, started with the 1979 referendum, corresponds to a deeply internalized need to re-masculinise 20th century post-industrial Scotland and finally make its masculinity correspond in the 21st century to the Victorian Highland myth of self-reliant manhood.

4. See Martín (2011) and Plain (2003) on John Rebus.

5. See Greig’s website for the complete list at <http://www.front-step.co.uk>. Rebellato (2003) offers an analysis of Greig’s work for the Utopian theatre company, Suspect Culture, which he co-founded.

6. See for Sam Bunton [http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect\\_full.php?id=203447](http://www.scottisharchitects.org.uk/architect_full.php?id=203447) and for Sir Basil Spence, <http://www.basilspence.org.uk/living/buildings/gorbals>. (Accessed August 2013)

7. Paradoxically, the only victim so far of a blow down was a woman spectator, pensioner Helen Tinney (61), who was killed by debris during the problematic demolition of the Hutchensontown C blocks on 12 September 1993. Glendinning and Muthesius expressed the hope that her death might also have “dealt a fatal blow to that most conspicuous ritual of Anti-Modernism—the demolition of tower blocks as public theatre” (1994: 327), a vain hope.

8. See the report *Create Streets* (2013) by Nicholas Boys Smith and Alex Morton for the think tank Policy Exchange. In “Chapter 2: People want to live in houses in streets”, they announce that “At least 89% of Britons want to live in a house on a street” (7) and that “Zero per cent (i.e. not one person) in one poll said they wanted to live in a tower block flat. Only 2% wanted to live in a modern loft style apartment” (7). Available at <http://www.policyexchange.org.uk/images/publications/create%20streets.pdf>. (Accessed August 2013)

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