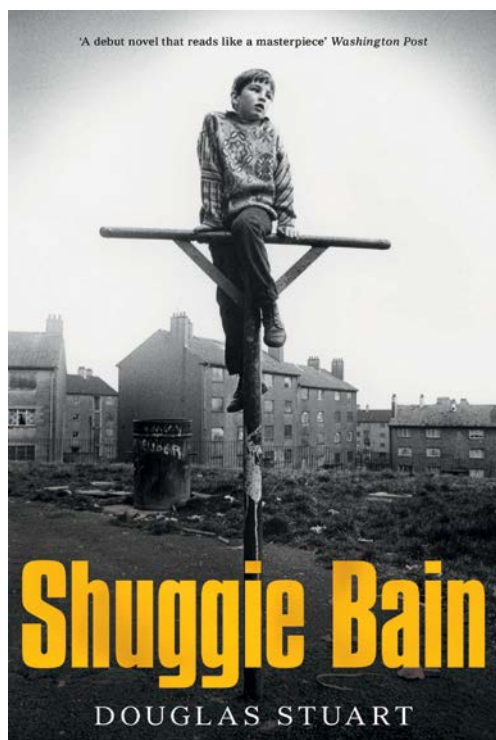




# Readers' Guide



## Shuggie Bain

### Douglas Stuart

Picador

[thebookerprizes.com](https://www.thebookerprizes.com)

## About the author

Douglas Stuart was born and raised in Glasgow. After graduating from the Royal College of Art in London, he moved to New York City, where he began a career in fashion design. His work has appeared in the *New Yorker* and on *LitHub*. *Shuggie Bain* is his first novel.

## About the book

Glasgow, 1981. The city is dying. Poverty is on the rise. People watch the lives they had hoped for disappear from view. Agnes Bain had always expected more. She dreamed of greater things: a house with its own front door, a life bought and paid for outright (like her perfect – but false – teeth). When her philandering husband leaves, she and her three children find themselves trapped in a mining town decimated by Thatcherism. As Agnes increasingly turns to alcohol for comfort, her children try their best to save her. Yet one by one they have to abandon her in order to save themselves.

Her son Shuggie holds out hope the longest. But Shuggie has problems of his own: despite all his efforts to pass as a 'normal boy', everyone has decided that Shuggie is 'no right'. Agnes wants to support and protect her son, but her addiction has the power to eclipse everyone close to her, including her beloved Shuggie.

Laying bare the ruthlessness of poverty, the limits of love, and the hollowness of pride, *Shuggie Bain* is a blistering and heartbreaking debut, and an exploration of the unsinkable love that only children can have for their damaged parents.

## What the judges thought

'We were bowled-over by this first novel, which creates an amazingly intimate, compassionate, gripping portrait of addiction, courage and love. The book gives a vivid glimpse of a marginalized, impoverished community in a bygone era of British history. It's a desperately sad, almost-hopeful examination of family and the destructive powers of desire.'

## Discussion points

The author uses Scottish dialect throughout the novel. What does this add to the narrative, and how did you find reading it if you weren't familiar with some of the words?

What did you think about the support that was available for Agnes' alcohol dependency? Do you think there would be better help for her now?

Shuggie has two older siblings who eventually escape their dysfunctional mother - how do you feel about them leaving Shuggie behind? Was it their responsibility to protect him or were they right to try to save themselves?

Agnes is obsessed with keeping up appearances, even when her handbag is full of cans of Special Brew. How did this facade of respectability work to alienate her from her friends and neighbours?

## Themed reading

*Trainspotting* by Irvine Welsh

*How Late it Was, How Late* by James Kelman

*And the Land Lay Still* by James Robertson

## Useful links

<https://www.douglasdstuart.com/>

<https://www.scotsman.com/news/opinion/columnists/shuggie-bain-douglas-stuart-shows-rewards-perseverance-brian-ferguson-2926654>

<http://www.washingtonindependentreviewofbooks.com/index.php/bookreview/shuggie-bain-a-novel>

<http://columbiajournal.org/review-shuggie-bain-by-douglas-stuart/>

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