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Matthew Fitt, *But n Ben A-Go-Go* (2000)

Scots write terrific, high-concept science fiction (see Muriel Spark and Iain M. Banks). Matthew Fitt's *But n Ben A-Go-Go* is not that, exactly. Scots produce science-factual speculation (see Ken MacLeod or Naomi Mitchison). *But n Ben A-Go-Go* isn't that, either. Celtic future/other worlds abound (see authors from George MacDonald to Margaret Elphinstone). This isn't quite one of those. To be reductive about it, what Fitt achieved is a dystopian, coming of age, scientific-detective-police procedural-medical romance. Sort of. And it's in lyrical/acerbic Scots.

This challenging, haunting novel follows Paolo Broon as he seeks delivery by death for his much-loved but erring and now deathly-sick wife. In a post-apocalyptic sea-world, Paolo, who has suspended his life to serve his living/dead wife, moves between worlds real and virtual, both of them artificial. Is he a striving Ulysses or a manipulated Telemachus?

Readers are surprised and intrigued to find themselves wondering if a lowly cyberjanny echoes and reinvents Greek myth. They are amazed to find themselves deep in a text that throws up linguistic barriers before non Scots—and Scots, too. What *is* a cyberjanny? It becomes obvious as we read. For it doesn't matter if we know no Scots. Fitt's text, like *Alice in Wonderland's* "Jabberwocky," tricks and tempts us down the rabbit hole and we understand before we can wonder what strange words are coming at us left and right. Fitt writes a thrawn, readable, un-put-down-able world.

So as a compelling novel in its own right, as a convincing whole-world science-fictional-factual-projection, as a lyrically voiced and darkly plotted challenge to family dynamics—and for a host of other virtues among which its transfiguring use of Scots is only one—*But n Ben A-Go-Go* is one of Scotland's most innovative, most important and best novels.

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