

12-15-216

Ali Smith, *Girl Meets Boy* (2007)

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Recommended Citation

Germana, Monica (2017) "Ali Smith, *Girl Meets Boy* (2007)," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 43: Iss. 2, 209–210.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol43/iss2/17>

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Ali Smith, *Girl Meets Boy* (2007)

A novel I would like to recommend is Ali Smith's *Girl Meets Boy*. It challenges conventional notions of identity on multiple levels. Despite her international high profile, Smith is often left out of the Scottish literary canon. This could be a reflection of the fact that her work doesn't always directly reference Scotland or Scottish national identity, although, arguably, her work is deeply concerned with identity.

Girl Meets Boy, as its title suggests, attempts to challenge existing views about gender and sexuality. The primary story level follows the love story of Anthea and Robin, a modern-day lesbian couple, whose relationship stands for a dynamic way of conceiving love as opposed to the conventional trappings Anthea's sister, Imogen/Midge, finds herself in. This is also underpinned by the story's secondary level, which references Ovid's queer myth of Iphis and Ianthe, of which Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* is a conscious rewriting.

But the novel doesn't just question the patriarchal foundations of heteronormativity by celebrating queer desire, although the imagined happy wedding scene—legally impossible at the time of publication—certainly endorses queerness as a subversive force within the novel. More than the actualisation of same-sex desire, queerness embodies an alternative way of being, one which focuses on the fulfilment of individual happiness rather than the execution of corporate dictates impersonated, in the novel, by the PURE water company, a multinational corporation Midge and Anthea work for.

Against the sexist and exploitative ethos of the consumerist-capitalist culture PURE stands for, Anthea and Robin represent the voice of the oppressed, women and homosexuals, persecuted and discriminated against on the basis of reductive readings of gender and sexuality. Juxtaposed to the closed-mindedness of the company—and the problematic globalised politics it entertains—is the fluidity of queer identity and desire, captured in the image of the River Ness, which flows freely, unlike the water bottled by PURE, and is the chosen background of the fantasy wedding scene.

In this sense, attention to Scottish scenery displays the novel's articulation of a Scottish identity which is simultaneously embedded in the local and subversively borderless. While the novel appears to lament a certain loss of community due to the politics of global economics

responsible, for instance, for the establishment of soulless shopping malls, it also exposes anxiety around a Scottish identity simplistically formed in binary opposition to England. Instead, the novel points to the transformative potential of queer identity to embrace a clever reconciliation of local community and cosmopolitan mindset.

Smith's *Girl Meets Boy* should be included in the list not only because it represents one of the most original voices in Scotland, but also because it produces a reading of Scottish identity that is culturally progressive and politically sound.

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