

## Tracing the Irish Culture in Select Works of Nora Roberts

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*"Culture is society, heritage and tradition,/ The family you are from,/The heritage you have got" (6-8, Dubey)*

Culture is a part and parcel of a society. In most cases the direct reflection of what made it and what it stands for. Culture, at heart can be seen in the simplest of gestures, mannerisms and everyday life. These speak as much about that particular culture as its festivals, celebrations and rituals do. Most of the rich cultures in the world have rich history or traditions that date back to centuries. But what makes certain ones to stand out is the steadfast way in which the generations have clung to them. These festivals, celebrations and holy days observed give testimony to the values that are held in high regard in a particular society.

Ireland, a land locked by the Atlantic Ocean with rolling hills, green valleys and navigable rivers is a perfect combination of urban and country life. Already rich with Celtic and Gaelic ancestry, the Norman invasion of the 12th century and the 17th century English-Tudor conquest added to the richness of the culture of Ireland. "It is the Irish who absorbed the Vikings, the Normans, and so on, not the other way around." (*J S 23*) The soulful Irish music, the musicality of the Irish language, the deeply forged bond of the people with their heritage, traditions and culture has made Ireland a perfect place for cultural coalescence.

The passing of folklore through generations with its fairies, leprechaun, deities, witches and immortals, had helped them to correlate with their ancestry. Their lore and music had instilled in them a deep respect for their history, culture and traditions.

Nora Roberts, an American writer of Irish decent had brought back the richness of the culture to which she traces back her roots. She calls herself "an Irish woman through and through" (Cadwalladr, Web), and her novels stand as a testimony to it as it drips with imaginative as well as descriptive power. Her words have a musical tilt which can be easily traced back to her ancestry. She has written more than 213 novels some of which traces the rustic Irish life which is soaked in art, literature and music. She has become, in the recent decades, a matchless author when it comes to Romance novels. She has sold nearly four million hard copies and has given a new flavor to the

genre of Romantic fiction. Nora Roberts says about Ireland in *Jewels of the sun*,

“The atmosphere in this country is certainly conducive to the forming of the myths and paganism with its small shrines and sacrifices to Gods, Celtic folklore with its warnings and rewards and the addition of culture seeded in through the invasions of the Vikings, the Normans” (23)

Born *In Trilogy* encompassing three books *Born in Fire*, *Born in Ice* and *Born in Shame* covers the emotional struggle faced by three Irish artists. Margaret Mary Concannon, a renowned glass artist, Grayson Thane a novelist and Shannon Bodine, a painter try to find balance between professional accomplishment and personal fulfillment of their lives with respect to their love interests Rogan Sweeney, Brianna Concannon and Murphy Muldoon.

In *The Gallaghers of Ardmore Trilogy* Roberts traces the life of the siblings Aidan, Shawn and Darcy Gallagher, the co- owners of the Gallagher’s Pub which has stood in the county of Ardmore for centuries and had been manned by the Gallaghers for generations. The series in three books *Jewels of the Sun*, *Tears of the Moon* and *Heart of the Sea* record the journey of Aidan with Jude Frances, a psychologist, Shawn with Brenna O’Toole, his childhood friend, Darcy with Trevor Magee, a successful entrepreneur. The series ends with their reconciliation in love life as they find their identity as individuals as well as couples.

The novels taken up for the study, *Jewels of the Sun*, *Tears of the Moon*, *Heart of the Sea*, *Born in Fire*, *Born in Ice* and *Born in Shame*, set in county Clare and Ardmore manifest the love of the people in Ireland towards music, dance and art in almost all its forms. These are the standards that would describe the basis of any culture. Their pubs, social gatherings and celebrations, especially celli, samhain and Belataine which are unique to Ireland, are exhibitions of music that speaks of courage and loss, joy and blessings, honor and love. These show the foundation values of their culture.

“Ireland is a land of poets and legends, of dreamers and rebels. All of these have music woven through and around them. Tunes for dancing or for weeping, for battle or for love.” (*TM I*). Music is a very integral part of an Irish household. It is an expression of the emotions and feelings and the Irish have music fit to almost all occasions. The fact that it not seen as a profession but as a passion for something that is a part of them is exhibited by the characters Aiden Gallagher, Shawn Gallagher , Darcy Gallagher from the *Gallaghers of Ardmore Trilogy* and Murphy Muldoon of *Born In Trilogy* . These four characters are real experts when it comes to handling musical instruments and they do it a practiced ease which comes with being around music instruments for long time. Shawn in particular is a composer of music which is heart rendering. The talent with vocal music adds to the appeal. Though gifted with a natural talent for music, for a typical Irishman it is a form of expression for reliving of his emotions and a part of a social setup. Music, in an Irish society is expected to be a part of any celebration as much as talking and laughing is. “Pennywhistles, a bodham drum, a knee harp, slipping from hand to hand without a break in the rhythm” (JS 68). The songs speak of the folktales and serve as an important medium for passing it on to the next generations and keeping it alive in the mind. The songs are also a platform in which the noble warriors and notable heroes are immortalized. The songs speak of the women who wait for their men who went to war, of the heroic deeds of the men in war, of the love that is left behind, of the innocence of the young love, of the power of love, of the power of sacrifice, of the courage of their ancestors. Music is not just the expression of the culture but in a way, a medium that preserved culture too.

The Irish are communal beings and their society is built on the values of trust and friendship. As in many instances in the books, help comes from the neighbor when the need arises. It requires no formal request or payback. In Ireland it is a perk of being part of the society, which comes with a sense of belonging. Just as Murphy leaves to cut peat, his neighbor Cooley joins him in the work

and the very next day he could be seen helping him with the harvest. It is not done with a sense of debt but with the sense of belonging. When there is work to be done, helping hands are lent and when fresh cakes are baked they are passed on to the nearby houses. Nothing is done in rigid timetable but is done as a part of being in a community.

Just as being a part of community results in helping hands in need, it also comes with listening ears. Irish are fond of their gossip. The messier it is the better. There are instances in *Jewels of the Sun* where the entire village of Ardmore indulges in a betting pool over the result of a marriage proposal. People consider it a pleasure to offer advice, be it on the ways to plant a garden or baking casserole or serious relationship struggles. Matchmaking is also done by older women in discrete ways by giving a nudge here or a push there whenever required. The sense of community and belonging are ingrained in their everyday life that most people know most of the others in their village and hardly a day goes by without a piece of information spoken casually about a fight, a proposal, a new pregnancy or a birth of a child. In cases of those it is normal for the womenfolk to gather at least once a week and coo to the baby and bring in homemade necessities. Maggie, new mother states in *Born in Ice* that the women had left behind enough of baked food to last them for a week. This is an expression of their solidarity which comes with part of being a community for generations.

The spirit of social dependence and music can be witnessed in its full swing in Irish Pubs and celebrations. The Pubs are meeting places where the day's happenings are shared and debated over a pint of Guinness, a barley based Irish drink and stew. "The age of the customers ranged from a baby in arms to the oldest man Trevor believed he'd ever seen, who was balanced on a stool at the far end of the bar" (*HS 12*). Apart from being a place to drink, the Pubs are the meeting places to lay low, enjoy the close of the day and catch on with local gossip. They are also centers of music as most of the nights the local musicians would perform or in some cases the patrons would break into songs over food and drinks. As Roberts puts it in *Jewels of Sun*, "Music and movement and shouted conversation and laughter" (56). It is all about relaxation, lazy conversations and enjoyment in the end of the day. While describing a Pub in *Born in Shame*, Roberts paints a picture of a typical Irish pub as seen through Shannon Bodine,

"The air faintly hazed from cigarettes, the murky colors, the smoke, the smudged wood, the men hunkered at the bar over big glasses of dark beer, the laughter of women, the murmuring voices, the piping tune in the background. There hung a television behind the bar. A man wearing a white apron over his wide girth glanced up and grinned broadly as he continued to draw another brew" (25)

The Irish hosted parties at homes called *Celli* held during *Samhain*, *Belataine* or mid summer's eve. These are informal gatherings where people gather to celebrate the seasons. A traditional *Celli* is usually accompanied with music, dance and hearty food. "Music from flutes and fiddles streamed out of the parlor where some were already dancing. Plates of food were piled high, balanced on knees while feet enthusiastically stomped in time" (*BS 58*). Guests are seen to bring foods, the womenfolk usually cook their signature dishes and food is enjoyed by everyone in accompaniment to talk and laughter.

"Time simply drifted, unimportant against the music and warmth. Children toddled or raced or fell to dreaming in someone's willing arms. She watched men and women flirt while they danced, and those too old to dance, enjoy the ritual." (*BS 62*)

Its historical and traditional magnificence are held in physical forms in the ruins of towers, cathedrals and most importantly, the structures called the 'Dance of Gods' which are stone structural formations in circle with a main, a slightly taller stone in one part of the circle, called the king stone. "It wasn't large and several of the stones that had served as lintels had fallen. But the

circle stood, majestic and somehow magically in the quiet field of green” (BS 16). These places, though lost in their formal grandeur, still stand as a testimony against time to remind the coming generations of the deeds and lives, of battles won and lost, of traditions upheld and customs lost.

These are facets that Nora Roberts has strewn in *Gallaghers of Ardmore Trilogy and Born In Trilogy* that offers a glimpse into this rich culture which is a perfect mixture of Celtic and Gaelic traditions that has absorbed the further cultures of the world and constructed for its lush green lands a multifaceted culture that thrives even after centuries adapting itself to the changing times yet staying true to its principles. This paper has been attempt to recapture the Irish culture captured by the writings of Nora Roberts.

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