

Studying Nora Roberts

Scholar An Goris studies the works of Nora Roberts, after a childhood of **reading Roberts' novels**. Goris focuses on how Roberts' work has changed as the genre has changed—and how that work has changed the genre in return.

A conversation with An Goris

Why did you study Nora Roberts?

An Goris: So my work on Roberts kind of focuses on her entire oeuvre. The basic question that I'm trying to answer is: How did she develop as an author? What's her relationship to the genre and how did that change over the years even as the genre is changing? And indeed, one of the things you see is that she started out as a kind of run-of-the-mill category romance writer, but very quickly became kind of different from some other writers and grew into a star very early on, actually, in her oeuvre.

I think one of the main things that she introduced almost in the genre and that she played a big part in making popular is series—series of romance novels, family series in particular. Writing about community in romance, that is one of the things that she has done very extensively from very early on in her work. And that has really taken off in the last decade in the genre at large. She's written in a lot of subgenres, and has made that possible, has made the idea that an author is not limited to a particular subgenre, they can write in many different subgenres; [she] has made that feasible. I think that's also an important aspect of her work

[...]

[...] In the early 1980s—the first book in which she introduced point of view—came out, I think, in 1983. And it's one of the early ones in which male point of view—one of the early category romances in which male point of view was explored. And I think readers have responded to that very enthusiastically. And she keeps doing it, and she keeps doing it really well.

And it's something that I think you can see in her work, that kind of “rise to the fore” of the hero, in her work in particular and in the genre more at large over the last 20 to 30 years. I always refer to it as “the demystification of the romance hero,” who used to be this mysterious person who we as readers—and the heroine—had no real access to. With the introduction of male point of view that has changed and the [hero] has been demystified and therefore become, I think, a much more complex character. That's something that Roberts has contributed to, but multiple authors have explored heroes in very interesting ways.

Why was the female point of view so prevalent?

I think that's a stereotype, a very kind of basic stereotype that's its easier for women to identify with women, and that that was what romance readers were doing, they were reading a heroine's story. And I think romance publishers were pretty convinced that that was the only character that they could relate to.

Have her readers helped you with your work?

I have been incredibly supported throughout my PhD project, readers kept sending me books because I was looking for a lot of early editions of Roberts' work and not having any luck finding them because all of these have disappeared or they might be in second-hand bookstores or on peoples' shelves or their attics or wherever and I *needed* them for my study. Sarah Wendell was kind enough to place a call that I launched on her website asking people to send

me second-hand, old editions of Nora Roberts books and they did so in huge amounts. People just kept sending me books for free and giving them to me and that was amazing, absolutely amazing.

What influence do you think Nora Roberts has had on the romance genre?
How have changes in the genre influenced her work?

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