



---

**Magical Immunization: Occult and the Pandemic in Nora Roberts' *Year One***

**Isha Biswas**

**Abstract**

With the world in topsy-turvy strained under the tides of a pandemic that shows no sign of ebbing, there has been a massive surge in consumption- no pun intended- of supernatural fiction and fantasy literature. Either as a means of escape from reality, or as a deep-dive into an allegorized society in crisis (or a world directly and terrifyingly reflective of the 2020s), fantasy with a dystopian, apocalyptic setting has always found a large readership. Concomitantly, there has been a re-popularization of the occult in real life as well: and this paper shall investigate Nora Roberts' *Year One* keeping that in mind in the context of the author's creation of the supernaturally-aided and supernaturally-quelled pandemic in her novel. Alarmingly predictive of the Covid-19 horror, Roberts' narrative follows the life of the survivors of a disastrous, self-mutative airborne virus that levels more than half of the world population in weeks. I shall investigate socio-literary implications of how most of the unaffected are revealed to possess magical abilities which are shown to be genetically and generationally coded, thus causing a divide between them and the non-magical victims, culminating into a eugenicist drive of culling which turns into an actual "witch"-hunt. Taking into account the cultural connotations of choosing Scotland as Roberts' preferred setting for the genesis of the plague coupled with her use of Scottish legends about dark forces, the paper will further delve into possible evocation of Celtic pagan mythologies, occult medical lore, and the inspiration drawn from the accusation and persecution of marginalized "white witch"/ "witch doctor"/ "wise women" healers during Black Death and witch trials in early modern Scotland.

**Keywords:** Magic, Witch hunt, Celtic, Plague Literature, Fantasy, Healers, Selectivity.