

**The Blend of Scottish Culture, Customs and Traditions
in Liz Curtis Higgs' Select Novels**

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Culture is defined as the ideas, customs and social behavior of a particular people or society. It includes not only arts and letters, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems, and everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music and arts. It includes the celebration of culture-specific holidays by a group or society. Culture is often partially defined by these celebrations, such as Christmas and Easter. Culture is more about ideas or a group of customs and culture changes continuously.

The customs and traditions of a society go hand in hand. All societies of the world have their unique customs and traditions that have evolved over a long period of time. Custom is a way of doing things in a particular way pertaining to the society. It is about practices, which have been done by lots of people for a stretched time and it is called as “customary way” or the special way of doing things. Ceremonies are a class of customary way of things.

Tradition is a custom that have been passed down over successive generations and have been done throughout history. It is the handing down of statements, beliefs, legends, customs,

information, etc., from generation to generation, especially by word of mouth or by practice. A religious or social custom that has been passed down over generations becomes a tradition. Thus customs slowly take the shape of a tradition. Customs and traditions come and go; culture evolves. Traditions often include the passing down of a hereditary customs that can range from cooking recipes to family hierarchies, family legends and vacation destinations. These customs are rarely in written form and are most often passed down the generations by word of mouth. Commencement is a tradition. Breaking glasses at a Jewish wedding is a tradition. Turkey at Thanksgiving is an American tradition and so is ham at Christmas and BBQ at picnics.

Tradition and culture form the identification of a particular society. These traditional rituals and activities remind one of ancestors and past, whereas the culture defines the attributes of a particular society at a particular time and place. The concepts of tradition and traditional values are frequently used in political and religious discourse to establish the legitimacy of a particular set of values.

Speaking about the customs and traditions of a society or a group of people has become a rich source of inspiration for authors. The author has to work hard and deep in order to bring out successfully the customs and traditions of a sect to be aptly fit with the plot of his story. The culture, customs and traditions of a society have to blend with the background of the plot.

Many authors have incorporated their plots with the background of a society. For example, Chinua Achebe's novels portray African customs, traditions, and the culture. Tony Morrison portrays the agony of the black women. Chitra Bannerjee and other Indian writers

have depicted the customs, culture and tradition of India in their literary works. Literature reflects life and without mentioning the lifestyle, culture and customs of a society, a great literature cannot be produced.

Liz Curtis Higgs, a contemporary American novelist has woven her story in the 18th century Scottish background. She is a master story-teller and her depictions of the landscapes, inns, bothies, castles, historical places, cultures, customs and traditions often take the readers to the Lowlands of Scotland. Though her characters are fictitious are her plots are from the Old Testament of the Bible, her fictitious characters have been incorporated with the Scottish culture and traditions. The novelist has mentioned historically significant places like Edinburgh, Dumfries, and Galloway etc. Liz has applied the Scottish customs and traditions minutely whenever it is necessary. These traditions play an important role in twisting the plot and when the characters go against the culture, they undergo a traumatic turn consequence in their life.

Scotland has its own tradition, superstition, legends, folklore, magic and pageantry in its history. They are the most well-known symbols of Scotland. The colourful history of this fascinating country includes poetry, songs and music, plants, historical building, ancient Celtic designs, mythical creatures, famous Scots and many more. Scotland culture and traditions literally stretch back into the mists of time. Scotland's tumultuous past defines her culture and is at the roots of Scottish traditions, celebrations, myths, art, literature, national pride.

Marriages are important for all societies and each society has their own unique customs and rituals to be followed in a ceremony. Scotland always has its own way and things which

they follow till this day. Marriage in Scotland is a form of both civil and religious unions between individuals. The Scottish tradition does not allow the younger daughter to get married when the first daughter remains unmarried. Custom requires the bride to flit away from her house for a week before her wedding and she could return to her house on the day of her wedding. According to Scottish customs, the bride and the bridegroom are not to hear their marriage banns read in the parish. They consider it as unlucky. After the marriage, the bridal party has to cross the moving water twice on the route home from the kirk.

This has been portrayed by the novelist in the novel, *Thorn in My Heart*. Jamie had taken Rose by chaise to Kirkbean parish that morning,...because it was unlucky to hear their own banns read” (TIH, 251). Leana, Rose’s sister listened to their marriage banns read on their behalf (TIH, 251). Custom required Rose McBride to flit for a week before her wedding and she flew away to Twyneholm to her aunt’s house. She would return on the morning of her wedding day with her Aunt Meg. When Rose McBride was about to marry her cousin Jamie, Leana the elder daughter remained unmarried. But then the climatic condition and custom play an important role in twisting the plot of the story.

Though they had done as per custom, Rose was not lucky to come for her own wedding on the day of her marriage. She did not have a wedding day of her own. Though Leana served as her sister’s proxy bride, the customs gave way for her to enjoy and experience all the joys of a wedding. As mentioned in the Scottish custom, the bridal party crossed the moving water twice

on route home from the kirk. Jamie and Leana had their bridal week, as Lachlan enforced the custom on Jamie.

Wild plants play an important role in finding a lover or husband, preparing love potions, gifts for lovers and in the customs of weddings and marriages. As rose is the most famous symbol for love, there are many other plants which are associated with romance and marriage. Ivy, plantain, marigold, thyme, wormwood, hazelnuts and yarrow are the plants that have been associated in love divining charms. Mistletoe has been used to predict the livelihood of marriage.

Authors like Shakespeare and many Greek writers had used such wild flowers and plants in their works for the characters to divine their future. Famous lovers of the past have been associated with particular wild plants. Romeo compares his beautiful but unknown love with the rose, and the aconite may have been the poison that kills Juliet. Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn had a private motif of intertwined honeysuckle.

Robert Burns in his poem also had mentioned of an old custom of burning the nuts, in which each hazelnut was named for a boy or girl and laid in the fire, and if they burned quietly together or jumped apart that would be the course of the romance. The witch Lillias Brown in her novel *Fair is the Rose* had told Rose McBride that the hazel nuts serve a deeper purpose and one can divine their future by casting the nuts in the fire. “This verra nicht ye’ll divine yer future husband. The nuts, the mirror, the apple – ye ken the auld ways, d’ye not?” (FIR, 71). It is an old way or custom to burn the hazel nuts in fire for divining one’s future.

In *Grace in Thine Eyes*, Liz has made a mention of everyday life of Scottish homes. On May Day, people circled the rowan tree three times clockwise. In many Scottish homes, the evening always ends with family worship. Davina wrapped herself in a thin plaid and “hold the plaid with one hand and clutched a knife in the other hand as the custom dictated: an ebony handle and a sharp blade” (GTE, 77). Yarrow is one of the plants used for divining one’s future husband and it is a Scottish custom. It is a harmless weed, a simple rhyme, and a girlish hope. She tucked the aromatic herb inside her stocking. After reaching her home, she removed her precious contents and then tucked the yarrow beneath her pillow. She lost herself in slumber and with a hope that she would meet her husband in a vision.

Davina’s expectations came true. She dreamt of a handsome golden prince whom she had not yet met in Galloway. She woke up and drew her dream in her sketchbook and hidden it from her parents. The customary action came true as she met him in dream and as the novel moves on, she had to meet her golden prince in a far away Isle of Arran. Though her future husband was divined in her dream, her life was shattered before it came into existence.

This paper has unfolded the customs, traditions, culture of Scotland and sometimes the customs have been served as a saving grace for the character and few times the old ways and customs had failed the characters in their life.

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