



Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague

By Geraldine Brooks

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An unforgettable tale of a brave young woman during the plague in 17th century England from the author *The Secret Chord* and of *March*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

When an infected bolt of cloth carries plague from London to an isolated village, a housemaid named Anna Frith emerges as an unlikely heroine and healer. Through Anna's eyes we follow the story of the fateful year of 1666, as she and her fellow villagers confront the spread of disease and superstition. As death reaches into every household and villagers turn from prayers to murderous witch-hunting, Anna must find the strength to confront the disintegration of her community and the lure of illicit love. As she struggles to survive and grow, a year of catastrophe becomes instead annus mirabilis, a "year of wonders."

Inspired by the true story of Eyam, a village in the rugged hill country of England, *Year of Wonders* is a richly detailed evocation of a singular moment in history. Written with stunning emotional intelligence and introducing "an inspiring heroine" (*The Wall Street Journal*), Brooks blends love and learning, loss and renewal into a spellbinding and unforgettable read.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

Geraldine Brooks's *Year of Wonders* describes the 17th-century plague that is carried from London to a small Derbyshire village by an itinerant tailor. As villagers begin, one by one, to die, the rest face a choice: do they flee their village in hope of outrunning the plague or do they stay? The lord of the manor and his family pack up and leave. The rector, Michael Mompellion, argues forcefully that the villagers should stay put, isolate themselves from neighboring towns and villages, and prevent the contagion from spreading. His oratory wins the day and the village turns in on itself. Cocooned from the outside world and ravaged by the disease, its inhabitants struggle to retain their humanity in the face of the disaster. The narrator, the young widow Anna Frith, is one of the few who succeeds. With Mompellion and his wife, Elinor, she tends to the dying and battles to prevent her fellow villagers from descending into drink, violence, and superstition. All is complicated by the intense, inexpressible feelings she develops for both the rector and his wife. *Year of Wonders* sometimes seems anachronistic as historical fiction; Anna and Mompellion occasionally appear to be modern sensibilities unaccountably transferred to 17th-century Derbyshire. However, there is no mistaking the power of Brooks's imagination or the skill with which she constructs her story of ordinary people struggling to cope with extraordinary circumstances. --Nick Rennison, *Amazon.co.uk*

From Publishers Weekly

Discriminating readers who view the term historical novel with disdain will find that this debut by praised journalist Brooks (Foreign Correspondence) is to conventional work in the genre as a diamond is to a rhinestone. With an intensely observant eye, a rigorous regard for period detail, and assured, elegant prose, Brooks re-creates a year in the life of a remote British village decimated by the bubonic plague. Inspired by the actual town commemorated as Plague Village because of the events that transpired there in 1665-1666, Brooks tells her harrowing story from the perspective of 18-year-old Anna Frith, a widow with two young sons. Anna works as a maid for vicar Michael Mompellion and his gentle, selfless wife, Elinor, who has taught her to read. When bubonic plague arrives in the community, the vicar announces it as a scourge sent by God; obeying his command, the villagers voluntarily seal themselves off from the rest of the world. The vicar behaves nobly as he succors his dwindling flock, and his wife, aided by Anna, uses herbs to alleviate their pain. As deaths mount, however, grief and superstition evoke mob violence against "witches," and cults of self-flagellation and devil worship. With the facility of a prose artist, Brooks unflinchingly describes barbaric 17th-century customs and depicts the fabric of life in a poor rural area. If Anna's existential questions about the role of religion and ethical behavior in a world governed by nature seem a bit too sophisticated for her time, Brooks keeps readers glued through starkly dramatic episodes and a haunting story of flawed, despairing human beings. This poignant and powerful account carries the pulsing beat of a sensitive imagination and the challenge of moral complexity. (Aug. 6) Forecast: Brooks should be a natural on talk shows as she tells of discovering the town of Eyam, in Derbyshire, in 1990, and her research to unearth its remarkable history. With astute marketing, Viking will have a winner here. BOMC, Literary Guild and QPB featured alternates; 8-city author tour; rights sold in England, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and Sweden.

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From School Library Journal

Adult/High School-Brooks's title is based on the actual lead-mining village of Eyam, Derbyshire, whose inhabitants voluntarily quarantined themselves for a year when stricken with Bubonic Plague in 1665-1666.

Anna Frith is widowed at 18 by a mining accident and is the mother of two young boys. Through her recollections, readers live through the year as her endurance and abilities are sorely tested. Anna works for the new young minister's wife, who teaches her to read and becomes more of a companion than a mistress. At her employers' suggestion, Anna takes in a boarder to help meet expenses. The man is a tailor and when a shipment of fabrics, apparently flea infested, is delivered from London-the plague is suddenly upon them. The minister convinces his flock to make the supreme sacrifice and arranges for food and supplies to be delivered to the outskirts of the hamlet. The story is a portrait of the best and worst in people faced with sorrow, terror, and death. Some succumb to madness, others display cowardice and hysteria, and a few look for solutions in murder or self-mutilation. Through it all, however, Anna grows in strength, abilities, and understanding as she faces the loss of her children, her friends, and her innocence, and takes on the tasks of an ever-dwindling populace. This is an excellently portrayed study of the wonder of human courage.

Carol DeAngelo, Kings Park Library, Burke, VA

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Angel Garcia:

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Joseph Woodruff:

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Al Fraire:

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