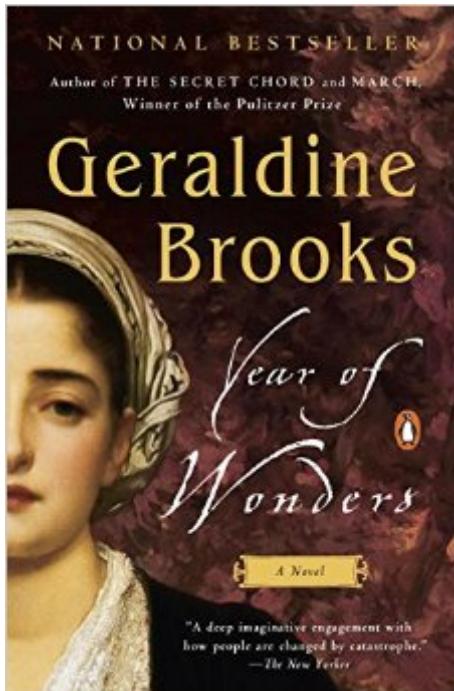


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Year Of Wonders: A Novel Of The Plague



Synopsis

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.

Book Information

Paperback: 308 pages

Publisher: Penguin Books; Reprint edition (April 30, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0142001430

ISBN-13: 978-0007743032

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.6 x 7.8 inches

Shipping Weight: 8.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars See all reviews (1,020 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

When I was first given this book, I thought, "Oh great, a book about The Plague. How depressing." To be honest, if it had not been lent to me, i probably would not have even picked it up. But by the third page, I was hooked. Not only is the story, about a small English village that tries to control the spread of The Plague, brought in by a bolt of fabric, by quarantining themselves, it is the story of a remarkable woman, Anna Frith. Anna is a widow (her husband being killed before the Plague) who loses nearly everything-her children, her friends, her sanity-to this terrible disease. While The

Plague ravages her friends and neighbors, Anna does everything she can to save them, and completes feats (midwifery, iron mining) that she never thought herself capable of. The book is incredibly well written; Brooks uses the vernacular of the time to great effect, but in such a way that it seems completely normal. It sounds cliched, but I truly could not put this book down. A truly surprising delight; I recommend it for any fans of Anita Shreve (who gives an endorsement for the book.)

There's a lot to like about Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders: A Novel of the Plague*. At its best, this novel is an evocative, well-written historical fiction that skillfully conjures up the day-to-day hardships of living in a small village overrun by plague and watching two-thirds of your friends, family, and acquaintances die horrible deaths. I really liked the focus on the diurnal struggles of a village increasingly depleted of its human resources. What do you do when the women who always prepared herbal remedies are dead? When young children are left parentless? The main character, Anna Frith, is a strong woman and something of a feminist role model; the plague brings out resources in her that she didn't know she had. Unfortunately, this novel is itself infected in places by melodrama and purple prose. There are a couple of minor eruptions early in the novel, but the big problem for this book resides in the last 30-40 pages. If the novel had ended on page 272, it would have been a much stronger novel. Regrettably, it continues until page 308. About five HUGE plot developments happen in this short space, which is startling enough in a novel that has been so well-paced up until this point, and several of them seem stretch credulity thin. There is also a surprisingly misogynistic passage from a previously likeable character in these final pages which really turned me off and seemed entirely inconsistent with everything we've learned about this character up until this point. I would still recommend this novel, as it does so much so well, but with the caveat that its quality rather falls off in the end.

Based on an actual event and real persons, author Geraldine Brooks tells a fascinating tale of a village in rural 17th century England that experiences a sudden outbreak of plague. The citizens seal themselves off from the outside world to avoid spreading the disease to neighboring villages and to give themselves up to God's mercy. The "year of wonders" experienced by the residents of this stricken community is told through the eyes of an intelligent and courageous young widow, Anna Frith. Brooks' imagery is bright and alive - the reader experiences the sights and smells of this world, the hope and despair of the characters and the gradual disintegration of their faith. The plague brings out the noblest and the basest of human behavior and Anna herself achieves things

she never would have attempted in any other circumstances. Because the majority of this book was so well written, I was quite disappointed in the ending which seemed rushed and contrived, almost as if the publisher had grown impatient and directed Brooks to wrap it up by the end of the day. I won't spoil the ending, but readers of Albert Camus' novel on the same subject will groan inwardly at Brooks' little joke in her placement of the final scene. Despite the ending, I recommend this book highly for its clear, concise style, vivid imagery, and realistic portrayal of human beings immersed in a long and tragic fight for survival and search for meaning.

Geraldine Brooks' Year of Wonders is a terrific novel. I encourage all to overcome the intimidating fact that the novel is about the plague and dive right in to the work. Year of Wonders is an intelligent, engaging, emotional read--very well done indeed. Anna Firth is a survivor, in many ways. She survives the plague which utterly decimates her village. When the plague arrives, she has already lived through much. Her father abused her and her husband has died in a mining accident, left her a widow with two young children, at the ripe age of 18. As disease rips through her village, Anna works with the minister's wife, trying to provide some solace, some comfort to the rest of the village. The plague is not the only killer in these times for several townspeople are killed by hatred, jealousy and prejudice. The plague ultimately leaves the village and Anna is a changed person, which sounds trite, I know, but in the novel, it's not. This novel is so fabulous, Anna's emotions so real. There were parts of this novel that literally had me in tears. I highly, highly recommend this novel. It is a wonderful and most enjoyable read.

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