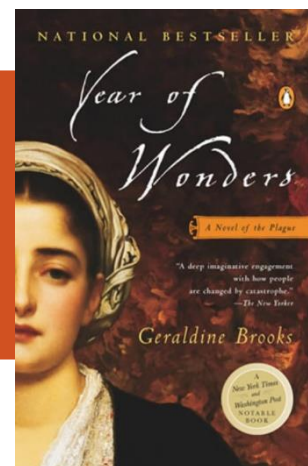




Year of Wonders

Geraldine Brooks



Author Background

Geraldine Brooks is an author and journalist who grew up in the western suburbs of Sydney, attending Bethlehem College Ashfield and the University of Sydney. She worked as a reporter for *The Sydney Morning Herald* for three years as a feature writer with a special interest in environmental issues.

In 1982 she won the Greg Shackleton Australian News Correspondents scholarship to the journalism master's program at Columbia University in New York City. Later she worked for *The Wall Street Journal*, where she covered crises in the Middle East, Africa, and the Balkans. In 1990, with her husband Tony Horwitz, she won the Overseas Press Club Award for best coverage of the Gulf War. The following year they received a citation for excellence for their series, "War and Peace." In 2006 she was a fellow at the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Studies at Harvard University.

Her first novel, *Year of Wonders* is an international bestseller, translated into more than 25 languages and currently optioned for a major motion picture starring Andrew Lincoln.

She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in fiction in 2006 for her novel *March*. Her novels, *Caleb's Crossing* and *People of the Book*, were New York Times best-sellers. She is also the author of the non-fiction works *Nine Parts of Desire*, *Foreign Correspondence* and *The Idea of Home*.

Book Summary

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.

Discussion Questions

- ❖ All the characters in this novel have their failings and as a result they are all fully human. Are you surprised by the secrets Elinor and Michael Mompellion each reveal to Anna about their marriage? How do they change your feelings about each character? Do they make either seem weaker in a way?
- ❖ The Bradford family bears the brunt of Mompellion's rage when they leave town to save themselves. However, weren't they only doing what every other noble family did in those days: run because they had the means to run? Can you really blame the Bradfords for running?
- ❖ How much of Mompellion's push for the quarantine had to do with the secrets he shared with Elinor? Did his own dark side and self-loathing push him to sacrifice the town or was he really acting out of everyone's best interests?
- ❖ Keeping in mind that this story takes place twenty-five years before the Salem witch trials in Massachusetts, what is the role of the Gowdie women in the novel? What is it about these women that drives their neighbours to murderous rage?
- ❖ How would you explain Anna's mental and spiritual unravelling? What are the pivotal experiences leading up to her breakdown and her eventual rebirth?
- ❖ Discuss the feminist undertones of the story. How does each female character—Anna, Elinor, the Gowdies, and even Anna's stepmother—exhibit strengths that the male characters do not?
- ❖ In a story where the outcome is already known from the very beginning, discuss the ways in which the author manages to create suspense.
- ❖ The author creates an incredible sense of time and place with richly textured language and thoughtful details—of both the ordinary everyday life in Eyam and the extraordinary. Discuss some of the most vivid images and their importance to the story.
- ❖ Can we relate the story of this town's extraordinary sacrifice to our own time? Is it unrealistic to expect a village facing a similar threat to make the same decision nowadays? What lessons might we learn from the villagers of Eyam?

References

- ❖ LitLovers: Year of Wonders (Brooks) <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/1191-year-of-wonders-brooks?start=0>
- ❖ Geraldine Brooks: <http://geraldinebrooks.com/>