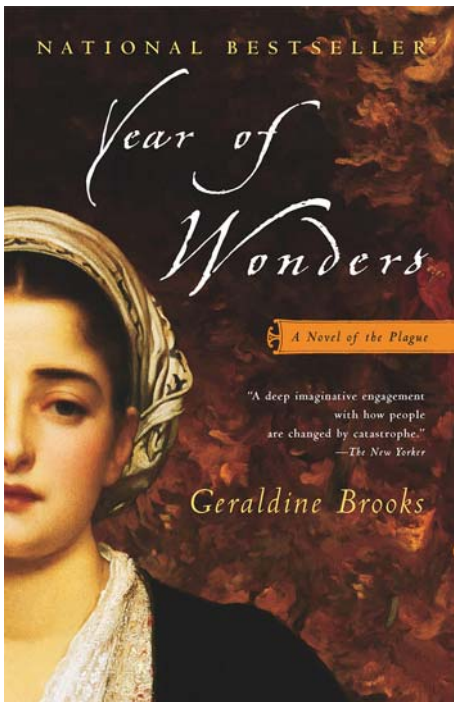


Year of Wonders



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Hannie Rayson

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A novel set in the years of the Great Plague in England (1665-66) would not seem, at first blush, to be a 'good read'. However, Geraldine Brooks surprises the reader.

Year of Wonders is set in the village of Eyam, in the Peak District of Derbyshire. In 1666, the village voluntarily quarantines itself – no-one to leave, no-one to enter – when plague (*Yersinia pestis*) arrives and starts felling the villagers. This is historically correct and some of the characters in the story are based on historical people.

Despite this being a story of a community that is ravaged by the plague – two-thirds of the inhabitants succumb – it is not morbid. Geraldine Brooks does not dwell on this. She shares with the reader the horrors of the disease and the agonising deaths that usually followed, but this is the background to a story of love and loss, and the most noble and the worst of human behaviour. The 'she' is actually Anna Frith, a woman who works as a servant to the nobility ensconced in the local manor and to the church rector and his wife.

Anna takes the reader on a first-hand account of her own losses, the losses of those around her and how different people cope with and react to the horrors around them. She manages to navigate her way through personal hardship and tragedy and the hardships of others. He is intelligent and ends up being a saviour to many of the inhabitants. Anna also develops as a person through the year, finding new strengths and increasing independence. There are many opportunities for her to give up, but she doesn't.

This book explores a community under immense stress and pressure and how the individuals in that community respond differently.

In Eyam, 1666 truly was a year of wonders.