

Chapter notes: leaf- fall 1666



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Chapter Notes: Leaf-Fall 1666 We have looked at the first chapter – which chronologically occurs towards the end of the text, and discussed some of the reasons why Brooks might choose to structure her novel in this way. We see a lot of characters interacting with each other in ways that are quite different to the next chapter, demonstrating how much they have changed during the time of the plague. Brooks has taken her time here to describe the desolation of the garden that Elinor cared so much for – this reflects the desolation of the village and the characters – particularly Mompellion whose despair is so evident here.

Anna (our narrator) is stoic, and is keeping things afloat. Her caring nature is evident in her attempts to assist Mompellion and also in her care for his horse Anteros. However, she refers to herself as a servant and you have all picked up on the fact that her behaviour does not at all resemble that of a servant. This foreshadows the tremendous journey (that ‘Year of Wonders’) the reader is about to see Anna embark on. Chapter Notes: Ring of Roses Refers to children’s rhyme supposedly about the plague. Certainly echoes the plague sores that are found on George Viccars body during this chapter.

The chapter ironically begins with Anna saying that the last winter – when her husband died – was the most difficult she had lived. No-one expected this plague. We examined the burgeoning relationship with George which is cut short by his illness. We see Anna’s passion for her children (challenging God’s edict that none be placed before him) and her desire to be with a man again. We learn a lot about the lives of women in puritanical society in this chapter, and how Anna is already different from them. `Chapter Notes: The

Thunder of his Voice Meaning of the title becomes apparent in the very last page of the chapter.

Has a religious resonance. We are introduced to Anys Gowdie in this chapter – a woman quite unlike those of her time. Anna feels drawn to her and changes many opinions in discussion with her, showing us how unusual Anna herself is for a woman of the time. Anys reveals her affair with George and his intentions to Anna. There are no deaths in the chapter – but the plague is discussed at the dinner at the Bradfords where Anna is serving. Anna goes home and checks her boys – both appear unafflicted. Chapter Notes: Rat-Fall. Obviously modeled on Leaf-Fall, what is the meaning of this chapter title?

It begins with glorious descriptions of nature – the people believe they have contained the plague. Anna plays with her children and interestingly, Mompellion enters the picture. Very Garden-of-Eden-esque. Anna is uncomfortable around him. This stands in stark contrast to what we are about to experience. The boys playing with the dead rats is ominous. The weather soon changes, and Anna remarks on the insects biting her boys. She longs to talk with Anys and begin to see the world in ways that she does. One of the boys playing with the rats starts showing symptoms. Mem Gowdie is sent away as they fetch a physician.

The physician flees from the plague. Anna's baby Tom dies during the chapter. Aphra scolds her for doting in him – she has lost many babes herself. She tells her it is folly to love them until they are walking and talking. It is clear that the plague has struck the town. Chapter Notes: Sign of a Witch Anna compares the plague to the falling of a whip that continues to strip a man's back on p. 81. We learn that her elder son Jamie passes away even as

he is still grieving for his brother. Anna tries a number of remedies to soothe or cure Jamie which must have been common at the time, to no avail.

In fact, they seem to make things worse. It is only Anys who is able to soothe him – she promises Anna prophetically on p. 84 that her arms won't be empty for long. Mompellion comes to pray for Jamie and Anna “hears the words as if far away”. P. 86 Anna tells us of her grief and her inability to understand why she has not succumbed when her children and many around her have. Of particular importance are the questions she asks in the graveyard on p. 87. While all this is happening (which is personal and thus central to our narrator) it is clear the plague has spread throughout the village.

It has certainly not been contained as they hoped. The townspeople seek a scapegoat, and Anna comes upon them accusing Mem Gowdie. Anys is not far behind and they seek to lessen the hysteria that has grabbed all around them. Pp. 89 – 91. Brooks creates a lot of tension in these pages. The responses of the townspeople here will prove useful in a number of possible themes to discuss around the text. In saving Mem Anys draws attention to herself and Anna finds that her loose tongue around Anys and George helps condemn her friend. Anys uses all her wits to distract and anger the villagers and accepts that her death is inevitable.

Her actions here may be hard to understand and we will need to discuss them. Mompellion comes to confront them but is too late to save Anys. They have created yet another tragedy within their town, and unwittingly destroyed the woman who may best have helped. Consider the irony of Mompellion's comment: “oh yes, the devil has been here tonight”. Chapter Notes: Venom in the Blood The atmosphere in the village gets bleaker and

Brooks comments that the witch's blood has not saved those that followed her into her grave. Mem Gowdie falls ill and is taken into care at the rectory, but passes soon after.

The herblore of the village is lost. No law is willing to come to the town to hold anyone accountable for what happened. Surprisingly, Mompellion's sermon preaches love rather than punishment of vengeance (pp. 102 – 103), and he invites his predecessor Reverend Stanley to come into the Church (p. 100). This is significant given the religious upheaval of the time. The two have worked together for the good of the town and the older man shows his support of the younger. Mompellion pleads for them all to stay confined in the village rather than spread the plague seeds.

Many agree, some if only for lack of food and provisions to travel. This is all evident in the conversations after the service. It also becomes clear that neighbouring villagers will send them food if they stay on quarantine. The Bradfords are not noticed slipping out quietly from the proceedings. This is a powerful chapter title and its meaning will require discussion. Chapter Notes: Wide Green Prison Those that stay in Eyam feel a kind of grace in their decision, which is juxtaposed with the hasty and discourteous exit of the Bradfords. They even defy the reverend's pleas.

Bradford accuses Mompellion of just trying to make the villagers feel better about having to stay (p. 115), which threatens the gentle peace many found at the church earlier. Consider the title of the chapter when discussing this. Many servants are left without a home or job and are distributed amongst the village. Kindness even in their darkest hour. This is worth noting – the darker aspects of humanity depicted in these chapters often outweighs the

good we could see if we looked too (p. 117). Elinor gets on with the business of helping the town.

We have some good examples here of the teamwork and balance in the relationship between Elinor and Michael. Elinor encourages Anna to help with midwifery, although Anna has horrible memories of her mother dying in childbirth pp 120 – 121, because they are “all that she has”. Elinor takes some milk of the poppy in case it is needed, and Anna calls upon her memories of the manner and technique of Anys Gowdie. On p. 122 she says the words the Gowdies said: May the Seven Direction Guide this Work, and feels that Anys is there guiding her as to how to deliver the baby safely.

That night, they celebrate life instead of death, but Anna pockets the little vial of milk of the poppy at the end of the chapter. Chapter Notes: So Soon to be Dust The title from the chapter comes from the English burial service taken from Genesis 3: 19. Why might this be important? The story of Jakob Brand and Maggie Cantwell shows us the types of responses people from Eyam might find in the neighbouring villagers. (pp. 129 – 131) Anna has a confrontation with her drunk father (pp. 133 – 135) and we found out more about her relationship and responses to him. Chapter Notes: The Poppies of Lethe

This chapter title strikes me as somewhat ironic – poppies stand for remembrance but Lethe represents forgetting and oblivion – oblivion brought on by remembering? Does this make sense in Anna’s case? It’s also a very dark chapter whereby Anna questions whether she can go on amongst all the death and loss. Anna begins the chapter by musing about falling down a hill – a metaphor for her temptation with the poppy she lifted

at the end of the previous chapter. It is a substance she knows from when Sam broke his leg and was treated by the Gowdie's. Anna repents her theft but cannot bring herself to give the vial back.

She makes a concoction of poppy and honey to hide the bitter taste and experiences sweetdreams of her dead children. The day she awakes to seems darker for her efforts, but she notices her mind is calm and she has slept well for the first time in a long time – 10 hours. The day is indeed bitter as she comes across plague ridden Sally Maston (p. 140) whose mother has died already and cannot care for her or ease her suffering. Anna looks after the children as best she can, but recognizes that it is a deathwatch. There is an interesting exchange with the sexton (a church official who comes to pick up bodies) on p. 41 that shows the exhausted attitude of the townspeople to death. Elinor tells Anna that her childhood friend Lib Hancock (who she told the gossip about Anys and George too which eventually led to Anys' downfall) lies on her death bed. Anna rushes to her, but she is too far for them to put the incident behind them. After these traumas, Anna again relies on the poppy for sweet dreams, but she wakes up to the harsh reality that she has no more. She then remembers the herb stores at the Gowdies and sets off to replenish her stock. On her way, she visits the Talbot cottage as she does not see smoke coming from the chimney.

She discovers two things there – that Richard Talbot has attempted to burn off his plague sore in an effort to burn out the disease, and also that Kate has brought a charm (like a spell) to attempt to dispel the plague also. She tells Anna she brought it from the spirit of Anys Gowdie. Anna knows this to be untrue, but cannot solve the mystery just now. When she arrives at the

Gowdie cottage she finds Elinor there, who she momentarily mistakes for the ghost of Anys. Elinor explains that she is there to learn what herb lore she can from the Gowdies, in hopes of saving the town.

Elinor reveals she is well aware why Anna is there, and convinces her that she should not attempt to forget her boys through escape via the poppy. She asks Anna if she had sweet dreams and she answers ‘ the sweetest I have ever known’. (p. 149). Elinor says she remembers this well, and warns her that the poppy is “ a jealous friend and will not lightly loosen its embrace” (p. 149). She goes on to reveal her sad history to Anna (pp. 150 – 155) and how she came to marry Michael. She does not however reveal all and the biggest secret will be revealed by Michael in the final pages of the novel.

They begin their work with the herbs and Elinor has made a study of the victims and notices that while the plague has claimed many, it has not claimed many “ silver hairs”. They decide to start arming the young with as many natural medicines as possible. Anna worries about how she will cope without the poppies and notes that she can always find them amongst the Gowdie’s garden. Question your response to this. Anna also realizes she can throw herself into her work, and this may keep her going. Chapter Notes: Among Those That Go Down to the Pit A very long chapter.

Michael is exhausted and Elinor and Anna try to convince him not to do so much. The reader should take note of the relationship and balance between Michael and Elinor after Elinor’s revelation of the previous chapter. Jakob Merrill dies and young Brand who has been living with them and caring for the children is named his heir. Anna notes that the cold season demands so much of her – she is busy every minute of every day, delivering babies and

learning about the herbs. She explains the processes she and Elinor try, and how they learn through trial and error.

They rest only on Sunday – when Elinor dreads to see in the church pews how they are losing the battle (p. 167-8) In his service, Mompellion says that he must close the church and the church yard – there are too many dead to bury there. He asks the parishners not to worry about not being buried on hallowed ground, God will find them. He faints at the pulpit. Reverend Stanley takes over. Elinor and Anna take him back to the rectory. In this chapter we also learn about the plight of Merry Wickford, a miner's daughter who alone survives the plague. The other miner's may take her father's area if she is unable to produce a dish of lead.

Unable to convince the other miners to help Merry, Elinor tells Anna they should help as Anna has knowledge of the mines from Sam. This frightens Anna, who knows enough to recognize how dangerous this is. She also knows that miners are superstitious about having any women near them (p. 175) Nonetheless they take Sam's gear and try (p. 178). Anna is gripped by fear and the two women soon realize they are unable to meet the challenge. Anna remembers that fire-setting can be used, a dangerous practice that cost Sam his life. Elinor encourages her saying that the Plague could catch them any day.

Elinor wants to accompany her but (for the first time) Anna speaks harshly to her if the silliness of not being out there to dig her out if needs be (p. 184). Earth buries her and Anna accepts her death. However, Elinor and Merry have both not obeyed her instructions and are on hand to dig her out. They present the overladen dish and save Merry's mine. Mompellion is amused by

Elinor's presence of mind and outfit. Anna sleeps well that night. (p 188)

Chapter Notes: the Body of the Mine Anna recovers from her wounds. Joss Bont takes on the role of grave digger, eeking hefty payment from those too weak or sick to bury their dead. The chapter continues with further examples of his greed and callousness. The final straw is when he digs a grave for Christopher Unwin who lies ill but not dying. He does not even have the plague. When Unwin lives, Bont angrily demands payment for the services that were neither asked for nor necessary. (pp. 196 – 197) Bont is humiliated by Mompellion. Anna hears that her father is thrown out of the tavern, and worries for her stepmother and her children. Aphra laughs when she hears and says “ I am my own ways of bridling that mule” (p. 98). However, that night Bont hits him with his spade and attempts to bury him anyway, in order to steal his goods(p. 199 – 200) Unwin takes his grievance to the Body of the Mine (from the last chapter) as the only quasi-legal system left.. Unwin is also a miner and thus has rights to this. No one speaks up for Bont and he is sentenced to have his hands impaled to a stone as punishment for theft. It is generally up to kin to retrieve the accused, but Aphra's children are all but one sickened with the plague and she cannot go. Anna doesn't realize this and never seeks him out.

Bont dies on the hill – which leads to greater tragedies later (pp. 204 – 205). His body is partially eaten by animals, and Aphra has to deal with this just after she buried three of her children with her own hands. Her behavior at the Grave is strange and unholy, even for one as superstitious as her(pp. 207 – 208). Chapter Notes: The Press of their Ghosts Anna grieves her father and the rectory and tells his history to Elinor. We learn to have some

sympathy for him in this (pp. 209 – 210). Anna feels free of him after the telling – like she is strong enough to face him now.

Anna and Elinor's strength and resilience is contrasted with the other women in the town who are buying charms to ward off the plague. Spring arrives and the lambs are born easily and the village looks pretty again. Although Anna notes it does not over-shadow the still dwindling numbers when they go to pray at Cucklett Delf. Half way through June the village has lost half its population to the plague and this takes its toll on people. Anna details the changed appearance of John Gordon who punishes his body to atone for his sins. (p. 217 - 219). Mompellion and Anna later visit his wife to confirm this.

John is later found dead and his wife contracts the plague a week later. This makes voices whisper as to whether he was right or not. Jane Martin takes to sleeping with many men to survive. Mompellion chastises her for it harshly (rather than the man), does Elinor's history have anything to do with this? The chapter ends ironically with Anna feeling jealous of the Mompellions for having each other (pp. 228 - 229) Chapter Notes: A Great Burning Elinor begins coughing which sends Anna into a panic (pp. 232 - 233). She reflects on all that Elinor has meant to her (pp. 34 - 235) and Elinor asks Anna to look after Michael. Her fever breaks on p. 237. It is not the plague. Michael is overjoyed and Anna is jealous again (p. 239). Renewed, Michael preaches to the villagers that there should be a great burning of their possessions that might carry the plague (he is inspired by Urith Gordon here, who accepted possessions from plague homes and died). He calls it a sacrifice to God. Aphra is drawn to the fire in black rags – it becomes clear that she is

pretending to be the ghost of Anys Gowdie and selling the charms around the village (p. 243).

The villagers turn on her, and Michael tells them not to violate this spiritual place. Aphra is taken and held by two farmers – who cruelly throw her into a pit of manure which she must tread all night (p. 245 – 246). Elinor and Anna try to bathe and soothe her but she is angry and accuses Elinor of stealing Anna and her children (pp. 247 -248). Anna worries for Faith, the remaining girl and when she eventually goes to look for her finds something startling (pp. 249 – 251). Chapter Notes: Deliverance Anna comments that she avoids Aphra and wishes she hadn't – foreshadowing again.

They realize that they have not had new deaths for some time and hope that the plague has passed. Michael comments that new growth is present at the site of the Great Burning. Michael and Elinor argue about whether or not it is yet time to celebrate the passing of the plague. Michael wants to hold off. In tears, Elinor comments that not all are as strong of will as he. What does this mean really? Eventually a date is fixed and Michael and Elinor dress in white, Elinor with spring blooms in her arms. As he begins to give thanks, Aphra appears.

She is clearly mad and blames Mompellion. Mompellion attempts to calm her and sadly Faith's corpse is damaged in this. Aphra swings wildly with the knife, ending her own life and Elinor's. (pp. 257 – 259) Chapter Notes – Apple-Picking Time Faith, Elinor and Aphra are buried and Anna considers how best to serve the memory of her friend (pp. 264 – 264). Michael goes into seclusion. He cannot bear Anna to speak of Elinor. When Anna offers to

shave him they have an intimate moment (p. 266). Memories of the past run rampant here.

Michael is astonished that Anna can read Latin. Michael remains alone for a season and Anna says she cannot rouse him. She brings him the good news of the town, showing the reader that life is moving forward outside the walls of the rectory (pp. 269 – 270). Anna decides to embrace life and make the most of it, symbolized by taking Anteros off for a ride. Mompellion is enraged and Anna takes him into her arms (pp. 273 – 281). He relationship begins but is destroyed by the revelation that he never slept with Elinor. Anna feels she has stolen something from Elinor (p. 83) She finds Michael cruel and perverse (p. 284). She comes upon Elizabeth Bradford and agrees to go and tend the birth. The surgeon abandoned a case Anna solves easily and she remarks that the little girl reminds her that she is to go on (p. 287). She saves the child from being killed as the result of adultery and promises to leave the village and care for the girl herself. (pp. 288 – 291). She is given jewels to do this. Anna plans to leave her cottage to Merry Wickford and plans to swap her sheep for a donkey to carry her away. Mompellion interrupts her planning.

He knows the whole story and feels Anna may be in danger from those who would seek to destroy the child still. He gives her Anteros and an escape route (pp. 293 – 294). Chapter Notes: The Waves, Like Ridges of a Plough'd Land (Epilogue) The epilogue begins with Anna remembering a poem and marveling that it was written by a woman, showing how small she once believed the world and the capacity of women to be. She describes where

she has ended up and how she got there. There are many key passages to look at, and much discussion to be had for the purpose of this chapter.