

# Anna's role as narrator in year of wonders



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First person narrators often serve as important additions to texts. This is the case in Geraldine Brooks' *Year of Wonders*, where the intelligent, authentic voice of the central character Anna Frith added significantly to the story as she described places and people with reliability and consistency. Her balanced views and commentary on her own torrent of emotion throughout the plague year give readers an insight into the plague not replicable by third person writing, and her vivid descriptions of literary devices such as the weather or the nature surrounding her act as important symbols of the text consequently adding greatly to its overall meaning. If it were not for Anna's constant, detailed accounts of elements of the nature surrounding her, the text would lack greatly, as her descriptions so often emphasise key ideas of the novel. Weather is a primary example of this, as she reiterates that the plague begins in spring in the very first paragraph of "Spring, 1665" as she explains George Viccars arrived "in the following spring". This, accompanied by the fact that the plague ended in "apple picking season", acts to juxtaposition the horrific events of the plague year as the plague begins in the season of life and ends in "leaf fall". Through this, the randomness of catastrophe is conveyed to readers more completely than simply the unsystematic deaths that occurred throughout the year, and the idea that life continues to exist no matter what is emphasised. When Anna moves to Oran she describes "the dazzle of the sunlight", and her constant mentioning of words relating to light in this chapter imply Anna has finally found a place of relatively consistent happiness where she can grow without the constant pressure of crisis. Anna's descriptions of plants throughout the text further add to its meaning, and Elinor's character is encapsulated by "her little Eden", described in detail by Anna who paints a vivid picture of the

garden and states that "all manners of flowers flourished there". This reflects the support offered by Elinor to all classes of people throughout the novel, and how her tender care allows characters such as Anna to "shine" far brighter than they thought possible, adding to the character in a way that direct descriptions cannot. Overall, Anna's contribution to the novel in a symbolic sense is crucial in our understanding of the chaotic plague year and our perception of certain characters. Anna acts as a reliable narrator further in Year of Wonders through her uncompromised descriptions of people and places, as well as her usage of language made redundant in modern times. When introducing readers to the Bradfords for the first time, the dialogue is littered with adjectives describing the Colonel as "arrogant" and "perverse". The women of the household are portrayed as possessing "vapid beauty" and as being most "proud" and "sour". Her rich vocabulary weaves together to paint a sharp picture of the family as a whole, and her continuous descriptions of all characters involved in the book allows readers to gauge each person's place in the village and a general overview of their important characteristics in relation to the storyline. Anna paints a similar word picture of the village itself, and readers learn of the "thin thread of dwellings", as well as the "tilled fields" and "sheer stone face" that rises above the town. This depiction of the village is located early in the novel, assisting in transporting readers to a place very different from their own and adding an authenticity to the novel. Her narration also transports readers to a very different time, mostly through the scattering of vocabulary not familiar to a modern audience that was used heavily in the time of the novels writing. She talks of using her "tallow stub" to give light to her book, and uses words such as "upon" more frequently and in different contexts than it

is used now, seen when she articulates that George Viccars dress is “ upon my body”. Her descriptive devices and language are essential in enhancing the novel’s plot and in allowing readers to become familiar with a time, place and society strange to them. Moreover, Anna’s interior monologue greatly enhances the readers understanding of the plague year as they share in the myriad of varied emotions she experiences, and gain an insight into the workings of her sharply intelligent mind. By allowing readers an insight into her personal reactions of the plague year, sympathy is evoked and the novel as a whole becomes more emotive. Firstly, we see her suffer extraordinary anguish at the death of her two young boys, depicted in her grieving tone as she describes “ my arms reaching...for my babies...jolting suddenly wakeful when I do not find them”. When her resolve weakens and she resorts to taking poppy in a vain attempt to ease the constant pain that lingers in her subconscious, she feels “ the wretchedness of my own selfish scheme”, an emotion shared by readers as they feel compassion towards her moment of weakness and admiration towards her acute self-awareness. She articulates the gradual disintegrating of her faith at several points in the novel as she questions the “ dark and light” in which she has been “ taught to view the world” and eventually begins to see the plague as “ a thing in nature merely”. This allows readers a fascinating insight into the workings of her mind and the rational reasoning behind her eventual turning to “ hope”. Overall, the part Anna plays in narrating Year of Wonders is critical in enhancing readers’ perceptions of the plague, as well as their views on particular characters and understanding of the ultimately optimistic message Brookes hoped to convey. Through her descriptions of the vibrant nature surrounding her and her usage of vocabulary that transports readers to a

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time far gone the goings on of Anna's lucid mind allows readers important insights into the goings of the plague year and leads to her acting as an extremely reliable narrator.