

# "year of wonders" by geraldine brooks essay sample

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



In her novel Year of Wonders, Geraldine Brooks has shown the plague brought out the best and the worst in the people of Eyam". Discuss.

Throughout the historical fiction novel Year of Wonders, author Geraldine Brooks shows the audience that the horrific burden of the plague brought out the best and the worst in the people of Eyam. Under these unfamiliar circumstances, each of the villagers reacts differently to their losses, and how they handle themselves under the fear of not knowing who is next. Some of the mourning villagers are driven to the point of murdering, cruelty, and insanity in search of the reasons why the plague was brought upon them, and looking for the answers to find who is to blame for their suffering and "evil doubting of one another". We see the worst of Rector Michael Mompellion, come out after all the good he brought to the community; and as he begins to lose his faith, the audience also witnesses his strengths fade after the death of his wife Elinor. It is evident that the best was brought out in our narrator, Anna Frith, and come to admire her as being one of the few who grew strong from the suffering she witnessed during the plague, and of the tragic loss of her children. The courageous journey that Brooks takes us on through the eyes of Anna is one that the reader can both sympathise for and admire.

The way Anna reacts to what others say to her and the way that they act towards her, gives out a lot to learn about her personality, and how in the beginning she comes off to be the type of person to be easily overcome and influenced. We see this in the way that Elizabeth Bradford approaches her after returning to the village. It seemed that before the plague, whilst serving the Bradford's, they deemed it necessary to have a class hierarchy

between themselves and Anna. When they return Anna's reactions to Elizabeth's attitudes is evident that this class hierarchy is no longer existent. Anna is faced with some of her greatest fears throughout the novel, she suffers immense grief due to the loss of both of her sons, Tom and Jamie. The death of Jamie left her in such a state that she could not "recount the days that followed" his death. Anna also faces the fear of reliving the witness of the death of her mother, whilst birthing the Bradford's child. "It was as if there were two of me walking down those stairs. One of them was a timid girl...The other was Anna Frith, a woman who had faced more terrors than many warriors".

As the novel moves in its circular motion, the significance of this quote grows because we begin to understand the progress that Anna makes in coming from being a "timid" and withdrawn girl, to a strong, powerful and intelligent woman. However, the best most certainly wasn't brought out in all of the characters in the novel. Michael Mompellion struggles with keeping his faith and hopes high, as the deaths continue and precisely after the murder of his beloved wife, Elinor. In Leaf Fall 1666, we are introduced to rector Michael Mompellion as a depressed, grumpy and hopeless character. As the novel progresses, we sympathise and understand why Michael Mompellion feels and acts the way he did at the end of the plague terrors, and loses his faith in god. Unlike Anna, Michael has the worst brought out of him and acts in ways that are uncharacteristic of him. Eventually, these characteristics become permanent as he sinks into a deep depression. Michael witnesses the murder of his wife by Anna's stepmother Aphra Bont, and this is what

brings him to breaking point of loss of faith. " Deliberately, he opened his hand... I leapt forward to catch it, but he grabbed my arm"

It is evident that Mompellion's faith is lost when he drops the bible, and doesn't let Anna attempt to save it from touching the ground. It is also an indication to Anna that he wanted her to know his faith was lost. It is then that both the reader and Anna can see that Mompellion had had the worst brought out in him due to the tragedy of the plague. Mompellion spends majority of the novel, doing good to the community by sitting beside the sick and dying, and holding ceremonies for the healthy, praying that they too do not fall ill. These good deeds are what causes the reader to assume Mompellion would have the best brought out of him in the end, alongside Anna. However, the events that took place show reasoning behind Mompellion's actions and depression. Apart from bringing out great depression in Mompellion, the plague also drove some of the villagers to the point of insanity, because they simply could not make sense of why the plague was brought upon them, unsure of whether or not it was a sin they had committed or if the plague was a form of punishment from god, or whether it was Anys and Mem Gowdie who had sent the plague to them due to them accusing the Gowdie's of being witches because of their great knowledge in medicines and herbs. John Gordon thought that a way to avoid the plague was to strike himself and cause him physical pain so that god wouldn't bring the plague upon him.

" I perceived that he stopped every five paces or so, straightened, and raised the scourge to strike himself." The villagers were so persistent in finding

somebody to blame for their loved ones dieing that they attacked Anys and Mem, and accused them of being witches, and bringing the plague upon the town. This act of the villagers is one that can be used to demonstrate the effects that the plague had on everyone, and how it brought out the worst in people. At this point we see Mompellions anger towards the " monstrous" acts of the villagers... " Oh yes, the devil has been here this night. But not in Anys Gowdie!...Anys fought you with the only weapon she had to hand- your own ugly thoughts and evil doubtings of one another!" It is through these characters, and the way that they react to the fear and grief of the plague, that we see that it brought out some of the best in people, such as Anna. The plague made her stronger after overcoming some of her biggest fears and losses yet. We see the worst brought out in the villagers and Rector Michael Mompellion, as they all doubted their faith in god, and eventually, lost their faith due to the amount of death and illness that was brought upon them.