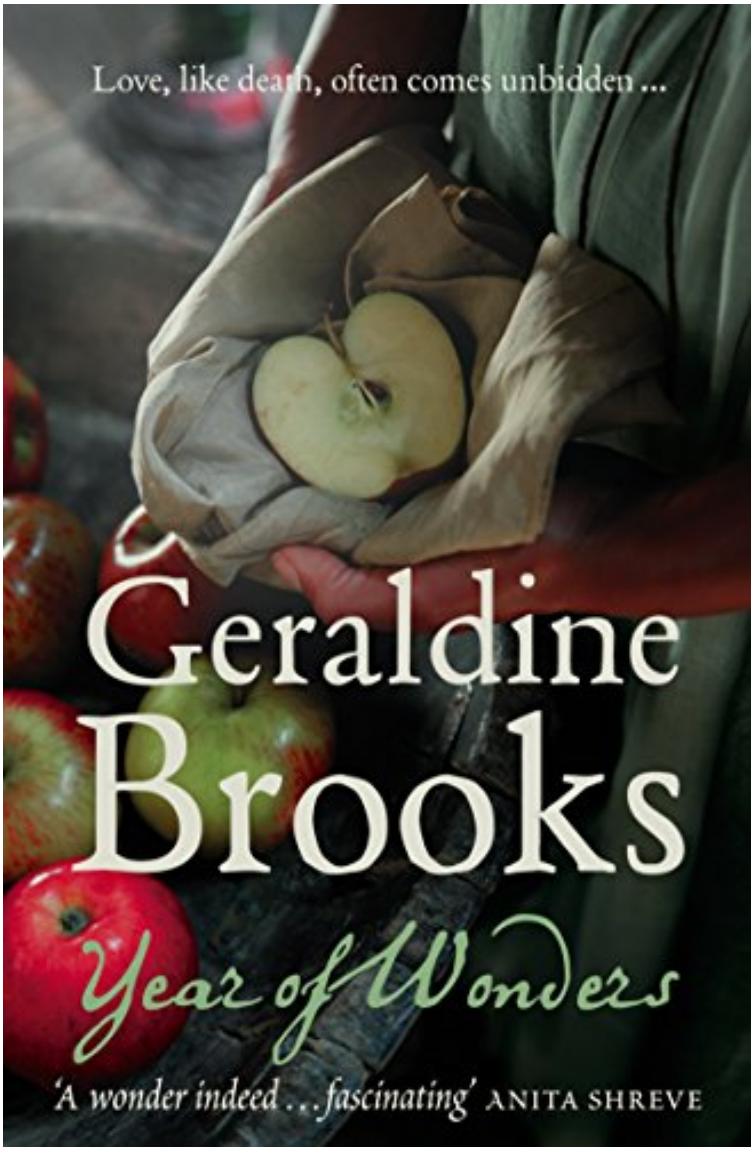
Year of Wonders



Par Geraldine Brooks
*ePub | *DOC | audiobook | ebooks | Download PDF*

Dtails sur le produit Rang parmi les ventes : #107045 dans eBooksPubli le: 2011-07-14Sorti le: 2011-07-14Format: Ebook Kindle

(Download ebook) Year of Wonders

Par Geraldine Brooks : Year of Wonders before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Year of Wonders:

Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurFrom the Pulitzer Prize-winning author of March and People of the Book.A young womans struggle to save her family and her soul during the extraordinary year of 1666, when plague suddenly struck a small Derbyshire village.In 1666, plague swept through London, driving the King and his court to Oxford, and Samuel Pepys to Greenwich, in an attempt to escape contagion. The north of England remained untouched until, in a small community of leadminers and hill farmers, a bolt of cloth arrived from the capital. The tailor who cut the cloth had no way of knowing that the damp fabric carried with it bubonic infection.So begins the Year of Wonders, in which a Pennine village of 350 souls confronts a scourge beyond remedy or understanding. Desperate, the villagers turn to sorcery, herb lore, and murderous witch-

hunting. Then, led by a young and charismatic preacher, they elect to isolate themselves in a fatal quarantine. The story is told through the eyes of Anna Frith who, at only 18, must contend with the death of her family, the disintegration of her society, and the lure of a dangerous and illicit attraction.Geraldine Brookss novel explores love and learning, fear and fanaticism, and the struggle of 17th century science and religion to deal with a seemingly diabolical pestilence. Year of Wonders is also an eloquent memorial to the real-life Derbyshire villagers who chose to suffer alone during Englands last great plague..comGeraldine Brooks's Year of Wonders describes the 17th-century plague that is carried from London to a small Derbyshire village by an itinerant tailor. As villagers begin, one by one, to die, the rest face a choice: do they flee their village in hope of outrunning the plague or do they stay? The lord of the manor and his family pack up and leave. The rector, Michael Mompellion, argues forcefully that the villagers should stay put, isolate themselves from neighboring towns and villages, and prevent the contagion from spreading. His oratory wins the day and the village turns in on itself. Cocooned from the outside world and ravaged by the disease, its inhabitants struggle to retain their humanity in the face of the disaster. The narrator, the young widow Anna Frith, is one of the few who succeeds. With Mompellion and his wife, Elinor, she tends to the dying and battles to prevent her fellow villagers from descending into drink, violence, and superstition. All is complicated by the intense, inexpressible feelings she develops for both the rector and his wife. Year of Wonders sometimes seems anachronistic as historical fiction; Anna and Mompellion occasionally appear to be modern sensibilities unaccountably transferred to 17th-century Derbyshire. However, there is no mistaking the power of Brooks's imagination or the skill with which she constructs her story of ordinary people struggling to cope with extraordinary circumstances. --Nick Rennison, .co.ukExtraitYear of Wonders, Chapter OneApple-picking Time I used to love this season. The wood stacked by the door, the tang of its sap still speaking of forest. The hay made, all golden in the low afternoon light. The rumble of the apples tumbling into the cellar bins. Smells and sights and sounds that said this year it would be all right: there'd be food and warmth for the babies by the time the snows came. I used to love to walk in the apple orchard at this time of the year, to feel the soft give underfoot when I trod on a fallen fruit. Thick, sweet scents of rotting apple and wet wood. This year, the hay stooks are few and the woodpile scant, and neither matters much to me. They brought the apples yesterday, a cartload for the rectory cellar. Late pickings, of course: I saw brown spots on more than a few. I had words with the carter over it, but he told me we were lucky to get as good as we got, and I suppose it's true enough. There are so few people to do the picking. So few people to do anything. And those of us who are left walk around as if we're half asleep. We are all so tired. I took an apple that was crisp and good and sliced it, thin as paper, and carried it into that dim room where he sits, still and silent. His hand is on the Bible, but he never opens it. Not anymore. I asked him if he'd like me to read it to him. He turned his head to look at me, and I started. It was the first time he'd looked at me in days. I'd forgotten what his eyes could do-what they could make us do-when he stared down from the pulpit and held us, one by one, in his gaze. His eyes are the same, but his face has altered so, drawn and haggard, each line etched deep. When he came here, just three years since, the whole village made a jest of his youthful looks and laughed at the idea of being preached at by such a pup. If they saw him now, they would not laugh, even if they could remember how to do so. "You cannot read, Anna." "To be sure, I can, Rector. Mrs. Mompellion taught me." He winced and turned away as I mentioned her, and instantly I regretted it. He does not trouble to bind his hair these days, and from where I stood the long, dark fall of it hid his face, so that I could not read his expression. But his voice, when he spoke again, was composed enough. "Did she so? Did she so?" he muttered. "Well, then, perhaps one day I'll hear you and see what kind of a job she made of it. But not today, thank you, Anna. Not today. That will be all." A servant has no right to stay, once she's dismissed. But I did stay, plumping the pillow, placing a shawl. He won't let me lay a fire. He won't let me give him even that little bit of comfort. Finally, when I'd run out of things to pretend to do, I left him. In the kitchen, I chose a couple of the spotted apples I'd culled from the buckets and walked out to the stables. The courtyard hadn't been swept in a sennight. It smelled of rotting straw and horse piss. I had to hitch up my skirt to keep it off the muck. Before I was halfway across, I could hear the thud of his horse's rump as he turned and strutted in his confinement, gouging clefts into the floor of the stall. There's no one strong or skilled enough now to handle him. The stable boy, whose job it was to keep the courtyard raked, was asleep on the floor of the tack room. He jumped when he saw me, making a great show of searching for the snath that had slipped from his hand when he'd dozed off. The sight of the scythe blade still upon his workbench vexed me, for I'd asked him to mend it long since, and the timothy now was naught but blown seed head and no longer worth the cutting. I was set to scold him about this, and about the filth outside, but his poor face, so pinched and

exhausted, made me swallow the words. Dust motes sparkled in the sudden shaft of sunlight as I opened the stable door. The horse stopped his pawing, holding one hoof aloft and blinking in the unfamiliar glare. Then he reared up on his muscled haunches and punched the air, saying, as plainly as he could, "If you aren't him, get out of here." Although I don't know when a brush was last laid on him, his coat still gleamed like bronze where the light touched it. When Mr. Mompellion had arrived here on this horse, the common talk had been that such a fine stallion was no fit steed for a priest. And people liked not to hear the rector calling him Anteros, after one of the old Puritans told them it was the name of a pagan idol. When I made so bold as to ask Mr. Mompellion about it, he had only laughed and said that even Puritans should recall that pagans, too, are children of God and their stories part of His creation. I stood with my back pressed against the stall, talking gently to the great horse. "Ah, I'm so sorry you're cramped up in here all day. I brought you a small something." Slowly, I reached into the pocket of my pinafore and held out an apple. He turned his massive head a little, showing me the white of one liquid eye. I kept prattling, softly, as I used to with the children when they were scared or hurt. "You like apples. I know you do. Go on, then, and have it." He pawed the ground again, but with less conviction. Slowly, his nostrils flaring as he studied the scent of the apple, and of me, he stretched his broad neck toward me. His mouth was soft as a glove, and warm, as it brushed my hand, taking the apple in a single bite. As I reached into my pocket for the second one, he tossed his head and the apple juice sprayed. He was up now, angrily boxing the air, and I knew I'd lost the moment. I dropped the other apple on the floor of the stall and slid out quickly, resting my back against the closed door, wiping a string of horse spittle from my face. The stable boy slid his eyes at me and went silently on with his mending. Well, I thought, it's easier to bring a small comfort to that poor beast than it is to his master. When I came back into the house, I could hear the rector out of his chair, pacing. The rectory floors are old and thin, and I could follow his steps by the creak of the boards. Up and back he walked, up and back, up and back. If only I could get him downstairs, to do his pacing in the garden. But once, when I suggested it, he looked as if I'd proposed something as ambitious as a trek up the White Peak. When I went to fetch his plate, the apple slices were all there, untouched, turning brown. Tomorrow, I'll start to work with the cider press. He'll take a drink without noticing sometimes, even when I can't get him to eat anything. And it's no use letting a cellar full of fruit go bad. If there's one thing I can't stand anymore, it's the scent of a rotting apple. * * * At day's end, when I leave the rectory for home, I prefer to walk through the orchard on the hill rather than go by the road and risk meeting people. After all we've been through together, it's just not possible to pass with a polite, "Good night t'ye." And yet I haven't the strength for more. Sometimes, not often, the orchard can bring back better times to me. These memories of happiness are fleeting things, reflections in a stream, glimpsed all broken for a second and then swept away in the current of grief that is our life now. I can't say that I ever feel what it felt like then, when I was happy. But sometimes something will touch the place where that feeling was, a touch as slight and swift as the brush of a moth's wing in the dark.In the orchard of a summer night, if I close my eyes, I can hear the small voices of children: whispers and laughter, running feet and rustling leaves. Come this time of year, it's Sam that I think of-strong Sam Frith grabbing me around the waist and lifting me into the low, curved branch of a gnarly, old tree. I was just fifteen. "Marry me," he said. And why wouldn't I? My father's croft had ever been a joyless place. My father loved a pot better than he loved his children, though he kept on getting them, year passing year. To my stepmother, Aphra, I was always a pair of hands before I was a person, someone to toil after her babies. Yet it was she who spoke up for me, and it was her words that swayed my father to give his assent. In his eyes I was but a child still, too young to be handfasted. "Open your eyes, husband, and look at her," said Aphra. "You're the only man in the village who doesn't. Better she be wedded early to Frith than bedded untimely by some youth with a prick more upright than his morals." Sam Frith was a miner with his own good lead seam to work. He had a fine small cottage and no children from a first wife who'd died. It did not take him long to give me children. Two sons in three years. Three good years. I should say, for there are many now too young to remember it, that it was not a time when we were raised up thinking to be happy. The Puritans, who are few amongst us now, and sorely pressed, had the running of this village then. It was their sermons we grew up listening to in a church bare of adornment, their notions of what was heathenish that hushed the Sabbath and quieted the church bells, that took the ale from the tavern and the lace from the dresses, the ribands from the Maypole and the laughter out of the public lanes. So the happiness I got from my sons, and from the life that Sam provided, burst on me as sudden as the first spring thaw. When it all turned to hardship and bleakness again, I was not surprised. I went calmly to the door that terrible night with the torches smoking and the voices yelling and the men with their faces all black so that they looked headless in the dark. The

orchard can bring back that night, too, if I let my mind linger there. I stood in the doorway with the baby in my arms, watching the torches bobbing and weaving crazy lines of light through the trees. "Walk slow," I whispered. "Walk slow, because it won't be true until I hear the words." And they did walk slow, trudging up that little hill as if it were a mountain. But slow as they came, in the end they arrived, jostling and shuffling. They pushed the biggest one, Sam's friend, out in front. There was a mush of rotten apple on his boot. Funny thing to notice, but I suppose I was looking down so that I wouldn't have to look into his face. They were four days digging out Sam's body. They took it straight to the sexton's instead of bringing it home to me. They tried to keep me from it, but I wouldn't be kept. I would do that last thing for him. She knew. "Tell them to let her go to him," Elinor Mompellion said to the rector in that gentle voice of hers. Once she spoke, it was over. She so rarely asked anything of him. And once Michael Mompellion nodded, they parted, those big men, moving aside and letting me through. To be sure, there wasn't much there that was him. But what there was, I tended. That was two years ago. Since then, I've tended so many bodies, people I loved and people I barely knew. But Sam's was the first. I bathed him with the soap he liked, because he said it smelled of the children. Poor slow Sam. He never quite realized that it was the children who smelled of the soap. I washed them in it every night before he came home. I made it with heather blooms, a much gentler soap than the one I made for him. His soap was almost all grit and lye. It had to be, to scrape that paste of sweat and soil from his skin. He would bury his poor tired face in the babies' hair and breathe the fresh scent of them. It was the closest he got to the airy hillsides. Down in the mine at daybreak, out again after sundown. A life in the dark. And a death there, too. And now it is Elinor Mompellion's Michael who sits all day in the dark, with the shutters closed. And I try to serve him, although sometimes I feel that I'm tending just another in that long procession of dead. But I do it. I do it for her. I tell myself I do it for her. Why else would I do it, after all?