

**THE SILENT SUFFERINGS OF OPPRESSED MASSES: A NEW
HISTORIC STUDY OF GERADLINE BROOKS' YEAR OF
WONDERS**

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The remote facts of history are brought into daylight by an eminent American journalist and writer Geraldine Brooks. One of her works *March* honored her with attaining Pulitzer Prize.

Year of Wonders, a fictional work is inspired by the true story of the villagers of Eyam, summer of 1990. Generously, she spent some time with Eyam's local historian, John. G. Clifford, author of the informative *Eyam Plague* (1665-1666). She visited the small museum and skimmed the books which were greatly about Eyam, but the lore remains scant. She rendered her efforts to reveal the forbidden incidents to the spectators. Brooks says about her villagers as: "The account was so touching and terrible that it took root in my imagination" (Afterword 305).

New Historicism, a form of literary theory perceives intellectual history through literature and literature is understood through its cultural contexts. Harold Aram Vaseer in his anthology of essays," that every act of unmasking, critique and opposition uses the tools it condemns and risks falling prey to the practice it exposes" (The New Historicism).

The entire story is seen through the eyes of Anna Frith, the narrator, protagonist and "a woman who faced more terrors than many warriors"(15). She serves in the house of Mr. Michael Mompellion, the rector. Through she is an illiterate, she shapes herself as a midwife, herbalist and a socialist. She is looked down and abused by Michael that results in the birth of a girl child. GayatriChakrovorthySpivak says in, "Can the Subaltern Speak?", " the subaltern is very often, though not quiet always, gendered female in my work... because women the word over are still structurally subordinated to men" (Shmoop.com) When Anna voluntarily renders to reads him the Bible, Michael rejects her readily by saying, "You cannot read Anna"(4).

Anna has lost her comfort and safest side of life because, she is a widow and two of her sons are dead. Her father Josiah Bont, grave digger, never cares Anna. Her step-mother Aphra, had Anna in her house in order to take care and nurse her children. She is turned away by Aphra telling, “.....Better she be wedded early to Frith than bedded untimely by some youth with a prick more upright than his morals” (7). Her words ached Anna and she comes out. She is treated as a mere object, which Simone De Beauvoir maintains that, “ Woman is to man “ a sexual being”, a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities, ‘ a natural defectiveness,’ ‘ an incidental being’ above all she is ‘ the others,’ she is woman in virtue of her anatomy and physiology”(12). Brooks focused on the fragility of servants in the Hall. When the Bradfords are about to set out of the Hall, they left their servants helpless. They wandered along the streets. Maggie Cantwell, Brand, the pantry boy and the maid Jane felt very sad. They screamed in agony. Maggie cries, “” Anna, they have turned me off! Eighteen years, and ordered out on a second’s notice!””(107). She continues to grieve,“.....now they put us out without a roof or a way to earn our bread!””(107). Anna too experienced the same, when Elizabeth yelled her saying, “” How dare you smirk at me, you insolent slattern!””(15).

The seventeenth century marks the survival of herbalists. This novel entails the chapters of two herbal women namely MemGowdie and AnysGowdie. They grew medicinal plants and extract medicines from barks, leaves, flowers and fruits. These medicinal women make concoction and decoction to cure the sick. Their service to the society and they are put to death in order to end the curse of the village. They are charged as witchcrafts. Stanley called Mem as witch. He debases her as, “” She defied God’s will in telling folk that they could prevent illness with her teas and sachets and simples””(39). Once, Mem was asked by the villagers to “ swim her”(90) in order to find out whether she is a witch who brought plague to village. This drove Mem to caught up in the depth and could not come back. Anys helped her resuscitate conscious. The village drunkards took this as a sign to accuse Anys as a witch. They hung a noose around the neck of Anys. The people of the village proved their savage conscious towards the poor medicine women.

The victims of the plague or their near and dear ones are treated illegally. Maggie and Brand faced severe insults while their way towards Stoney Middleton. The people of the village left a parcel of catcake and a flask alone at the milestone. A farmer, who saw them, permitted the both to spend the night among his cattle. When they reached the larger town of Bakewell, it was

market day. Poor Maggie and Brand has nowhere to escape. Someone from the crowd recognized Maggie and shouted: “” A woman from the plague village! Beware! Beware!””(126). Children started to peck stones at them. Both of them were treated as mere barbarians.

Nearly half of the entire population of Eyam works in mine factories. Accidently, Anna lost her husband Sam Frith in mine. People who work here have to strife hard from dawn to dusk. In some families, the situation becomes very pathetic. Merry Wickford, a small girl of George and CleathWickford lost her parents in plague. Already the entire family has undertaken the mine but they could not succeed in getting the one. Anna and Elinor came forward to help Merry Wickford because, if she cannot take a dish of one before the particular day, the mine will be taken over and owned by someone else. People at mine are dark and their safety is questioned. Brook’s usage of diction in narrating the task of Anna in taking one is excellent.

The segregation of classes is vividly exemplified by the sriptor while she talks about the congregation. People are given separate places to be seated. Their seats differ: “ the yeomen and miners toward the front, then the artisans, then the crofters and the hands”(19). The poor villagers placed themselves 3 yards away separated from each family, believed to avoid the passing of infection. Michael took religion in his hand and he attacked people not to leave the village. He asks the people to repent their superficial beliefs and turn towards God. Especially, when the Bradfords decided to leave the village, he rebuked them and speaks in favour of himself. His prejudiced notion make the readers to look him as a stone hearted man, as he fails to help Mrs. Bradford through he is good to many other souls.

Josiah Bont, a grave digger, is yet another man who pays no care to the poor and the needy. He charges hike for digging graves. Even at the courage of death, people are ablazed with ill-spoken words. On Sundays, he did not attend the congregation, instead, knocks at the doors of the ill and say, if he wants to make a grave, he will dig it” then and there or not at all”(191). The filthy words make the sick more panic. If the relatives of the dead ones have no money to pay, they have to give some objects. Once, a widow Brown paid him pewter for the graves of her man and boy. While we read Thomas Gray’s “Elegy written in a country churchyard,” we find the inspirational expression of human grief, Gray addresses the buried with all dignity and feels sad that they are bereft all contact with the members of their families.

The analysis and skimming of the text gives us denied yet unbelievable myths. Brooks succeeded in giving the remnants of the neglected scars. Brook’s painting efforts brought her

works an instant success. She is honored and can be applauded for unwrapping the emotions of trails of the periphery and make them to be in centre.

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