

In Geraldine Brooks' novel "Year of Wonders", the Plague that ravaged England in 1665 strikes the village of Eyam, resulting in catastrophe and chaos throughout the fragile society. In this time of crisis many of the villagers are revealed as being either of noble or villainous character, and others of being both. A character who is negatively affected by the Plague's horrors, in that they became a worse person after the ordeal, is Josiah Bont, as he began the year as harsh and disliked to become the evil pariah of the village by the end of the Plague. In contrast, his daughter Anna, the protagonist and narrator of the novel, displays a change from a sheltered and naive widow of two to a worldly woman who accomplishes much beyond what would be expected of her. Also, certain characters are shown in both positive and negative ways, such as Michael Mompellion, who is seen as the hero of the village until his secret is discovered by Anna. All of these changes occur because of the Plague and the situations it puts each person in throughout its devastation.

Catastrophic events can turn a sheltered view into one that spans half the world's breadth. This is seen as Anna Frith journeys from her naivety in a world of arduous labor and her loving children's seldom-seen smiles to a new life across the seas where she lives among a man and his other wives. This change would not have occurred if not for the plague arriving at Eyam, for Anna claims during her time in innocence, "I had no occasion to travel farther than the market town seven miles distant". Her honesty in this puts how small her own world was; an image that Brooks creates in the mind of the reader as they can imagine only existing within an eight or nine mile world. The naivety of Anna at this point in the story contrasts what had been said in the first chapter, which takes place after the Plague. By flashing back to Anna's time of innocent ponderings, Brooks shows how much Anna is yet to change as the story progresses. Indeed, this does occur, as Anna assumes many roles through-out the Plague year as a physic, mid-wife, miner and scholar. Had the Plague not struck her tiny world, her potential in these roles would not have been realized, nor would she have travelled upon the dangerous seas and into a strange land of a foreign God with a child that was not her own. In the eastern lands she reminisces of her old life, saying "for one who lived so long in a misty world, the vividness here can sear the sight". This reflection on her old world as misty or clouded is proof of her revelation of life's

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**Comment:** Topic sentences is too abstract.

meaning to her during the Plague year. After the chaos and loss of the Plague, Anna realized her potential as a woman and ultimately became a better person.

The transition from stark cruelty to utter evil is most often catalyzed by catastrophe. Josiah Bont, having led a hard life as a boy out at sea at the harsh hands of his overseers, sought to hide far inland from any who would take him back to the sea, and so took out his grief on his children and wife. Thus he was turned into a cruel and vindictive man, “he laughed then, his pride saved by my perfect humiliation”, due to trauma in his life. It is primarily from the narration by Anna, who has been a victim of her father’s abuse since her own troubled childhood, that Brooks is able to show a single opinion of Josiah to the reader as so make him out to be a vile, unpleasant man. It is not until the second instance of trauma in his life that his cruelty is raised a bar to evil. The Plague brings about a change in Josiah as he decides that rather to aid the sick, he would extort them by replacing the village sexton and charging a fare for his services, yet Anna states “that his heartless behavior hastened more than one person into the ground” as “a person who yet lived would lie in his sickbed and listen to the rise and fall of my father’s spud”. Brooks creates an image in phrases such as these of Josiah as a kind of reaper who is tailored to drive the suffering to death. The way in which Josiah dies is reminiscent of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion, he is spread-eagled upon a wooden stowe, left to die as he bled out. From this biblical allusion, Brooks turns Josiah into a martyr, whose work of evil is carried out by his wife. They are both proof that time of catastrophe can bring out the evil that is trapped within a corrupt mind.

A hidden truth can cloud a perspective, until the truth is revealed and the falsehood is shattered to reveal a bitter pith within. Through-out the novel, Anna’s view of Michael Mompellion is of a strong, grand man who bares the weight of the world and the village’s struggle upon his shoulders. Comments such as “his voice – rich, loud, grave – cut off the Bradford’s airy laughter” are made by Anna as a form of praise to show how her perspective of him is that of the reader, for we see the world of Eyam through her eyes. By using such narration, Brooks is able to influence the reader to believe that Rector Mompellion is the figure of excellence and purity that he is made out to be. However, it is later found out that his love for Elinor was twisted and warped beyond the normal stratifications of what love is. At this point, he is shed under a new, darker, light, “his grey eyes... inscrutable as pieces of smoky glass”. This is said by Anna after she finds out how

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**Comment:** Much better topic sentence.

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**Comment:** Biased? It is not objective is it? It positions the reader to think ill of Josiah- the reader is not given the opportunity to see the other side of Josiah- until after his death- Anna’s unreliable narrative?

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**Comment:** This is good- I would like you to use the word- Perhaps....

he treated Elinor when no-one else might witness it. By further employing her strong subjective narration, Brooks influences the reader, through Anna, to realize Michael's true nature as a loveless man. The truths of the cold recesses of his mind wherein his lies fester are a result of the Plague and its influence over him. The tragedies of the year had worn him thin, stressed to a point where his human ambitions were forced to the surface. Since he could not touch Elinor, her death allowed him to go free and advocate his lust upon the scullery maid whom he had befriended. The cruelty of his mind at work was revealed by the death of Elinor, brought about by the Plague's affect on Aphra. Michael Mompellion was both of nobility and corruption through-out the Plague Year.

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**Comment:** Quote needed to support this statement.

In her novel titled "Year of Wonders", Geraldine Brooks outlines that in times of chaos and catastrophe the best and worst in people can be brought out. This is done by use of certain character's change through-out the Plague year of 1665 in the village of Eyam in England. Changes for the best come in the form of Anna Frith, as she evolves from the timid and naïve widow to an intelligent and worldly woman. To juxtapose, Brooks uses Anna's father, Josiah Bont, to represent corruption in the face of crisis as he extorts the village for its worth. As well as this, Brooks employs clever narration as the character Michael Mompellion sways from a heroic figure to a ruined, almost sadistic man after the events of the plague year. Each change of character is drastic and impacts largely upon the flow of the narrative as the catastrophe unfolds and resolves itself within the horrific and affirming year.

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**Comment:** Clunky expression. Use the 50/50 rule...The best and worst in the characters....