

"The Maternal Evolution Of Anna: Psychological Effects In 'Year Of Wonders'"

Hezeline Mazerella. A^{1*}, Dr. LIZY.V²

¹Ph. D Scholar, Sathyabama University, Chennai. Email:-hezelinemazerella@gmail.com,
+919486934978
Assistant Professor, Sathyabama Institute of Science and Technology, Semmencheri, Chennai 119.

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ABSTRACT

The character development of Anna Frith in Geraldine Brooks' novel "Year of Wonders" is a profound exploration of maternal evolution amidst adversity. Initially, Anna is portrayed as a humble, young woman, grappling with the loss of her husband, and navigating the devastating outbreak of the plague in the 17th century English village of Eyam.

As the novel progresses, Anna's transformation into a maternal figure is marked by her resilience and courage in the face of overwhelming tragedy. Despite her initial vulnerability, she emerges as a pillar of strength for the community, taking on roles traditionally reserved for men and caring for the afflicted with compassion and determination.

Her journey toward maternal evolution is evident in her relationships, particularly with her children, whom she protects fiercely, and with the orphaned children of her village, whom she nurtures and supports as if they were her own. Through these relationships, Anna discovers her innate maternal instincts, demonstrating selflessness and sacrifice in her efforts to shield and guide the vulnerable.

Keywords: Resilience, Maternal Instincts, Transformation, Empathy, Community Support.

Geraldine Brooks "Year's of wonders" a best and the first novel indeed carries out the detailed explanation about a cruel disease Plague which killed the half of the people in the village Eyam which is nearby London. The author's explanation about the incident that brings the clear and vivid pictures of the village in the year 1666. The protagonist is Anna Frith, a servant widow single mother of the two beautiful children. The beginning of a novel portrait of how Anna survives in the pandemic.

Throughout the novel it explains the mental sufferings and the agony of women characters. As a woman writer Geraldine Brooks prioritizes the female and Kids who lost their family and struggle to save their own life in the pandemic. When the author explains about Anna's personal life, as the unbearable loss of her husband Sam Frith, she starts to work hard to lead her life with two loving children Jamie and Tom.

Without husband and proper financial support Anna did all the known work to spend her life. Her worst memory about the death of Sam drew her to suffer mentally, his short time life as a husband ended up in the mine, "They were four days digging out Sam's body. They took it straight to the sextons instead of bringing it home to me. They tried to keep me from it".

Anna tends to suppress her thoughts and emotions to balance her psychological level to avoid her madness. In her childhood she already witnessed the death of her mother. She ever cultivated the fear over the silence when she lost her husband Sam. Anna explains her loneliness as,

I open the door to my cottage these evenings on a silence so thick it falls upon me like a blanket. Of all the lonely moments of my day, this one is always the loneliest. I confess I have sometimes been reduced to muttering my thoughts aloud like a madwoman when the need for a human voice becomes too strong. I dislike this, for I fear the line between myself, and madness is as fine these days as a cobweb, and I have seen what it means when a soul crosses over into the din and wretched place. But I, who always prided myself on grace, now allow myself a deliberate clumsiness. I let me my feet land heavily. I clatter the hearth tools. And when I draw water, I let the bucket chain grind on the stone, just so hear ragged noise instead of the smothering silence.

When I have a tallow stub, I read until it gutters. Mrs. Mompellion always allowed me to take the stubs from the rectory, and although there are very few nowadays, I do not know how I would manage without. For the hour in which I am able to lose myself in someone else's thoughts is a greatest relief I can find from the burden of my own memories.

Beyond the struggle and worst memories, she found her happy life with her children, that "happiness I got from my sons, and the life that Sam provided," . Moreover, as the youngest mother of two she struggled to control her feelings for love. Her need for physical and mental support always dominates whenever she has close contact with men. Her desire to live a normal life like another woman by wearing a pretty dress to be attractive and to have a healthy lifestyle like her master Elinor. Which led her to fall into the short time affairs with Mr. George Viccars and Michael Mompellion.

When it comes to Mr. George Viccars is a journey tailor who travelled from London and lodged in Anna's house. The bond between Anna's family and Viccars becomes stronger as he shares his love with kids and vast knowledge with Anna. That encourages her to know more about the different people, society, and culture of different countries. Also, her hunger to learn new things as she has a very small social and friends circle which she mentioned as,

Like most in this village, I had no occasion to travel farther than the market town seven miles distant. Our closest city, Chesterfield, lies twice as far, and I never had cause to journey there. Mr. Viccars knew the great cities of London and York, the bustling port life of Plymouth, and the everchanging pilgrim trade at Canterbury. I was pleased to hear his stories of these places and the manner of life of the people biding there.

The knowledge and care that Vicaar possess made Anna to love him. So, day by day the love bloomed slowly into them and started to spend some quality time together by sharing gifts, playing with kids, and doing acts of service. As she, was still, I was surprised to discover, women enough alive within me to want to wear that dress. Hard work and a lean winter had rubbed me of the softness left behind after Tom's birth. Sam had liked me fleshy. I wondered what Mr. Viccars liked.....My body felt alive as it hadn't in a long time, and I knew quite well that only part of the reason was the feel of the dress. As I moved, the skirt swayed, and I felt an urge to move with it, to dance again like a girl.

Their physical affair is stated in the passage by Anna as, "He crossed the room and placed his hands on my waist, drew me gently towards him and kissed me. I will not say I know what would have happened then if his skin, when it bruised mine, had not been so hot that I pulled back."

Her longing for physical love shows as, "I loved the touch of my children's little hands, there was another kind of touch - hard and insistent - for which my body hungered." (33) clearly expresses the sexual desire of Anna. The longing for pleasure represents the actual and normal womanly behaviour. At the moment she wore that dress, Anna felt herself as a new person without any of the responsibility. Just for the sake of her bodily hunger. The beautiful Anna as a new woman is admired by Viccars was a wonderful experience of hers. But the death of viccars shows his sufferings in a deathbed. Anna is the only person who witnessed the death as, He died clutching the bedsheet. Gently, I untangled each hand, straightening his long, limp fingers. They were beautiful hands, soft save for the one callused place toughened by a lifetime of needle pricks. Remembering the deft way they'd moved in the fire glow, the tears spilled from my eyes. I told myself I was crying for the waste of it; that those fingers that had acquired so much skill would never fashion another lovely thing. In truth, I was crying for a different kind of waste; wondering why I had waited until so near this death to feel the touch of those hands.

Her loss and desire revealed throughout the death of Viccars, that affected Anna by mentally as she thought her lonely sufferings ended and Viccar will bring her a hope and faith for a new happy life. That's almost dried up like a flower which cannot be bloomed again. Anna gave up her all the thought about Viccar and started to vanish his thought away from her mind.

Anna acted as a good and caring servant of Rector. In order to save the promise Which, she had with Elinor as "I hope you will find it in your heart to be a friend to Mr. Mompellion, Anna...For my Michael will have need of a friend" . she showed additional care and concern towards Mr. Mompellion because Anna wanted him to be happy as when he was with Elinor. But apart from her friendship, Anna has some jealousy thoughts over Elinor and Mr. Mompellion that reveals as she "was jealous of both of them at once. Of him, because Elinor loved him, and I hungered for a greater share of her love than I could ever hope for. And yet I was jealous of her, too; jealous that she was loved by a man as a woman is meant to be loved. Why should I writhe on my cold and empty bed while she took comfort in his warm flesh?"

The statement carries the strongest desire of physical relationship and Anna's longing for love as Elinor has been receiving.

When the entire village started to be affected by the fever which ended up in death. The many familiar faces were disappeared within their next meet. Son in order to prevent the contagion and save themselves from getting affected. The people of Eyam started to maintain the social distance to avoid the spread of the disease. Though,

One walks if one must walk, in the very centre of the roadway to avoid the contagion seeping from dwellings. Those who must move through the poorer parishes cover their faces in herb - stuffed masks contrived like the beaks of grade birds. People go through the streets like drunkards, waving from this side to that so as to avoid passing too close to any other pedestrian...."They say you can hear the screams of the dying, locked up all alone

in the houses marked with the red crosses. The Great Orbs are all on the move, I tell you: there is a talk that the king plans to remove his court to Oxford. For myself, I saw no reason for tarry. The city is emptying so fast that there is little worthwhile society to be had. One rarely sees a wigg'd gallant or a powdered lady, for wealth and connection are no shield against Plague."

The domination of the Plague killed Anna's loving children one by one, her point of living and the value for life becomes prey to the cruel disease. Her motherly love for the kids Tom and Jamie melts the hearts of the reader. As Anna explains that "I loved Tom from the moment I first reached down and touched the crown of his head, all wet and bloody as it was..."

The motherly features are always shown in the character Anna, in the death of Tom she felt like she lost everything. As she explains, "I gathered him up off the gory pallet and ran into the street. My neighbours were all standing there, their faces turned to me, full of grief and fear. Some had tears in their eyes. But the howling voice was mine". when it comes to the death of "Jamie suffered for five days before God finally saw fit to take him". which is not tolerated by Anna.

The Plague is cruel the same way. Its blows fall and fall again upon raw sorrow, so that before you have mourned one person that you love, another is ill in your arms. Jamie was crying bitterly for his brother when his tears turned into the fevered whimpering of the ill. My merry little boy loved his life, and he fought hard to hold on to it.

Witnessing the sufferings and death of our own children is a pathetic situation to any mother. As "It is the hardest thing in the world to inflict hurt on your own child." (83) which is similar to the suffering of the Mother Mary on a day of Jesus Christ's crucifixion. In that moment mother of God wasn't able to save her son from the deadly trap and witnessed the death "standing by the cross of Jesus" (John19:25). The brutality of death is explained in the novel.

The motherhood of Anna was dominated over any other character in the novel. The statement "you are a good mother, Anna Frith." by one of the minor characters Anys Gowdie reveals. Anna came out of her pathetic situation and started to risk her own life to save other people. In a short time during the plague season, she becomes, Eyam's doctor, nurse, and midwife alongside her mistress Elinor.

Anna's thought of saving lives by doing midwife service has a strong impact from her mother's death during the delivery which had a complication and where Anna was helpless to save her mother and unborn baby sister. When Randoll Daniel seeks help to deliver his wife Mary Daniel and the unborn baby safely. "Mary Daniel was a small, vigorous woman of about twenty . This is the very first case in which Anna deals with the support and confidence given by Mrs. Elinor Mompellion. After the struggle Anna somehow made Mary Daniel deliver her baby boy safely where she was able to gather all the courage as a midwife "And for an hour, in that season of death, we celebrated a life."

Over these issues, Anna has managed to deliver the healthy baby girl to Kate Talbot, who lost her husband in the Plague. But definitely the birth of a new life after the death of her husband will be the incomparable support and the reason to live her life happily.

A week later Anna did a midwife service to a poor simple woman named Lottie Mowbray who delivered a baby boy without many complications. But, had a worry about the Plague affecting the child. So, Lottie tried some foolish superstitious process to keep the contagion away from the child. Luckily, Anna has faith in God and saved the baby from Lottie's foolishness ideas.

At last, she found her reason to be in church with Elizabeth Bradford. A young girl who wants to save her mother and unborn baby, who was left abandoned by the surgeon in order to let the baby die. The situation is almost similar to Anna's childhood incident. But, here for Elizabeth Anna was the last hope who helped Mrs. Bradford delivered "a perfect, precious little girl eased out alive".

After this incident, Elizabeth attempts to murder the baby girl by drowning in the bucket water as it was "born on adultery." Somehow Anna's bravery saved the baby's life from the Bradford family. As she promised Mrs. Bradford and Elizabeth, that "I will take her far from here, and you will have my promise never to hear a word from either of us again. You and your mother may tell whatever story you like." when she saw the baby, she felt the new race of hope into her that she reveals as,

"I looked into her deep blue eyes and saw reflected there the dawn of my own life. This little girl seemed to me, at that moment, answer enough to all my questions. To have saved this small, singular one - this alone seemed to reason enough that I lived. I knew then that this was how I was meant to go on: away from death and towards life, from birth to birth, from seed to blossom, living my life amongst wonders."

The new life given by Mrs Bradford becomes light for Anna's future thus, "I put the thought of the past year away from me and tried to think clearly of the future." In the end, Anna started her new future in Oran as Ahmed Bey's wife Umm Jam-ee and named the baby girl as Aisha by Bey "which is his word for 'life.'"

As a normal woman she is never able to find the permanent and true love from any other man. In the beginning of the love itself Mr. Viccar's lost his life because of the contagion. Eventually she raised her love for Elinor's life which drew Anna to attract Mr. Mompellion and to live with him. The physical relationship between Anna and rector grown as fast as it could. When Anna realised the reality about Mr. Mompellion, urged Anna to leave him permanently. So, Anna realized that lust is the temporary which cannot provide the successful life and permanent happiness.

Conclusion:

Anna's motherhood and the love for the babies explained in these details. After her great loss of the pretty children, she never tends to suppress her worries and motherhood feelings under the one roof instead she stepped out to save the lives as much as possible by risking her own life. At last, she found her true love and the reason for living after this struggle.

Anna's evolution into a maternal figure in "Year of Wonders" is a testament to the enduring strength of the human spirit amidst harrowing circumstances. Her journey from a vulnerable young woman to a pillar of resilience and maternal care underscores the transformative power of love and compassion, especially in the face of adversity.

Through her unwavering resilience, innate maternal instincts, and selfless sacrifices, Anna becomes a beacon of hope and support in a community ravaged by the plague. Her transformation is not merely personal but symbolic of the human capacity to rise above despair and find strength in nurturing others.

Anna's story resonates as a profound exploration of maternal love and its ability to transcend boundaries, societal norms, and personal grief. Her evolution inspires us to recognize the resilience within ourselves and the immense power of compassion and empathy, ultimately illustrating that even in the darkest of times, the light of maternal care can shine brightly, fostering hope and healing for all.

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