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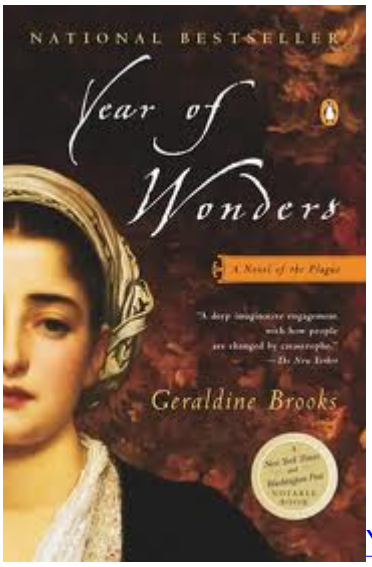
Year of Wonders and Caleb's Crossing

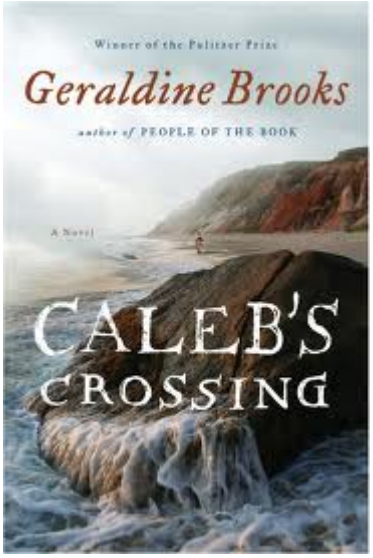


Year of Wonders [1] is a book about the plague, but it is also so much more than that. Anna lives in a small village in England in 1666. She has two small children and a hard working husband. Despite her struggles with her relationship with her father, and a new minister, things are generally going well for Anna. Unfortunately the true history of the village, as discovered by Brooks, creates a tragic backdrop for Anna's fictional life. First, Anna's husband dies in a mining accident, and to help ends meet, Anna takes in a boarder from London. Shortly after this, her boarder suddenly dies, and people in her village begin falling fatally sick. The death of Anna's husband is only the beginning of the upheaval that Anna is to survive. Near the end of the book, everything that she has known was turned up on its head.

Geraldine Brooks came upon a sign at the location of the village and did quite a bit of research to create fictional characters and events. Though all the action takes place in the small quarantined village, the language is lush and the characters vivid.

Like Year of Wonders, Caleb's Crossing [2] is based on a few brief true historic details that

Brooks uses to create a



powerful female character and weave a truly engaging story. We learn that in 1665 a native Wampanoag man, Caleb Cheeshahteaumauk, graduates from Harvard - true story. Using that small bit of truth, we meet the characters Caleb and the island's minister's daughter, Bethia in Brooks' newest novel. They forge a friendship in their early years, drawn together by a strong curiosity about the natural world and a deep love of learning. As they grow older, religion and family place pressures to keep their friendship a secret. Bethia's formal education goes nowhere. Her frustration and resignation about this is extremely touching and powerful.

These women are survivors in books with a strong sense of place, and I am reminded of Miss July from The Long Song [3] by Andrea Levy even though the time period is very different.
For the Love of Reading[4]Information, Answers & Reviews [5]American History [6]Britain [7]
Caleb's crossing [8]Fiction [9]Historical [10]Year of wonders : a novel of the plague [11]

Posted by Sarah B. on Dec 27, 2011

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