**“I have something very few people can claim: my freedom.” Are any of the characters in *Year of Wonders* free?**

The novel Year of Wonders, written by Geraldine Brooks, is set in the seventeenth century in the village of Eyam, England during an outbreak of the bubonic plague. The novel explores how only some of the characters can claim their freedom whether that is from a male character in the novel or the social expectations and normalities of the period. The protagonist Anna Frith along with Anys Gowdie can claim their freedom. The character of Elinor Mompellion may seem as if she can, but the life she lives is very different to that which is perceived, by both the reader and Anna.

Anna Frith can claim her independence and freedom from society. The death of her husband and two children, result in Anna falling into a state of depression “I had small will to live”. However with the guidance of her friend Elinor Mompellion and the wisdom of Anys Gowdie, Anna is able to claim her freedom against the social expectations of women of the period and is able to break away from her need of a male influence in her life. At the end of the novel when she moves away from the village to Oran, she marries a man, though only “in name if not in flesh”, signifying she is only doing what society makes her do and still maintains her independence. This growth from a timid housewife to free and independent woman has been shaped by the tragic events of the plague. Anys Gowdie is a character who could claim their freedom in any situation.

The independence and freedom from society and any male influence is something that Anys Gowdie can claim. Anys’ status as an independent and ‘free’ woman is unquestionable. The wisdom that she gives Anna is significant for Anna claiming her own ‘freedom’. She asks Anna “Why would I marry? I’m not made to be any man’s chattel” which shapes Anna’s views. Anna also got a sense of Anys’ thinking “I saw them through Anys’s eyes: shackled to their menfolk as surely as the plough-horse to the shares”. Anys’ ability to claim her ‘freedom’ from both society and men impacts on the other female characters in the novel. Elinor Mompellion is a character that seems as if she could claim in many ways her freedom, though this is not the case.

Elinor Mompellion is able to claim some degree of freedom as a woman. Although married, Elinor does not always conform to society’s expectations. She is prepared to get her hands dirty and is not afraid to do men’s work, as seen when she helps Anna obtain a dish of lead from the Wickford’s mine. However, there are limits to Elinor’s freedom. She is expected to be a dutiful wife and obey her husband. Mompellion’s religious beliefs also have an influence on her freedom. Although she longs for the physical contact of her husband, asking “Michael, how much longer?”, she must wait until Mompellion believes she has atoned for her sins. This signifies that although she seems to be free of society’s expectations and the social normalities of the period, she cannot completely claim her freedom from male influence.

The novel Year of Wonders, written by Geraldine Brooks, explores how the female characters in particular, claim their freedom against society’s expectations and any male influence. The characters of Anna, Anys Gowdie and Elinor Mompellion go against the social normalities of the time period in many ways and are able to claim their freedom.