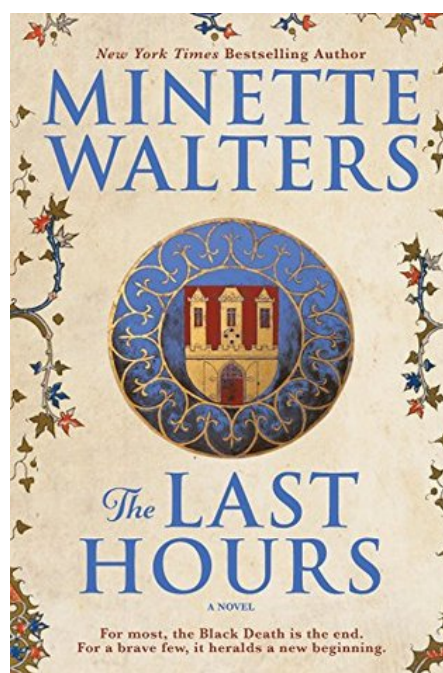




The Last Hours

Minette Walters

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When the Black Death enters England through the port in Dorsetshire in June 1348, no one knows what manner of sickness it is—or how it spreads and kills so quickly. The Church cites God as the cause, and fear grips the people as they come to believe that the plague is a punishment for wickedness.

But Lady Anne of Develish has her own ideas. Educated by nuns, Anne is a rarity among women, being both literate and knowledgeable. With her brutal husband absent from the manor when news of this pestilence reaches her, she looks for more sensible ways to protect her people than daily confessions of sin. She decides to bring her serfs inside the safety of the moat that surrounds her manor house, then refuses entry to anyone else, even her husband.

Lady Anne makes an enemy of her daughter and her husband's steward by doing so, but her resolve is strengthened by the support of her leading serfs...until food stocks run low. The nerves of all are tested by continued confinement and ignorance of what is happening in the world outside. The people of Develish are alive. But for how long? And what will they discover when the time comes for them to cross the moat again?

Compelling and suspenseful, *The Last Hours* is a riveting tale of human ingenuity and endurance set against the worst pandemic in history. In Lady Anne of Develish—leader, savior, heretic—Walters has created her most memorable heroine to date.

The Last Hours Details

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From Reader Review The Last Hours for online ebook

Paromjit says

Minette Walters enters new territory with this beautifully written, atmospheric, and historically detailed look at a community in the medieval era, a tragic period that devastated European populations in 1348 with the arrival of the Black Death through a Dorset port. The plague is no respecter of social distinctions and class, as it hits everyone alike as it moves swiftly in its rampage across the country, leaving enormous numbers of dead in its wake. The church puts out that God is behind this disease, seeking sinners and evil doers alone. Amidst this background, Walters gives us a compelling drama that unfolds on the estate of Develish, Lady Anne, a strong intelligent and courageous woman pushes forward in a progressive way by bringing her people on to the estate, including serfs, and refusing to let anyone else in, whilst promoting the practice of cleanliness.

Lady Anne incurs the wrath of her daughter, Eleanor, a nasty piece of work, when she bars entry to her husband, Sir Richard, after he returns dying from a mission to negotiate Eleanor's marriage. Eleanor more closely echoes the characteristics of her repellent father. Social barriers fall apart in the face of the pestilent plague. As starvation hits the estate, a party ventures out into the dangerous world in search of supplies. Walters captures the superstition, fear and ignorance prevalent in the period as well as social norms and attitudes. The Black Death provides the wide range of characters the background amidst which their strengths and weaknesses as people are revealed mercilessly. Lady Anne, Thaddeus and Gyles were the standout favourites of mine in this novel. This was a fantastic piece of historical fiction that drew me in with ease, and I have the next in the series and looking forward to devouring that soon. Many thanks to Atlantic Books for an ARC.

Rachel Hall says

The Last Hours served as both my introduction to the writing of Minette Walters and to the genre of historical fiction. As a reader of crime thrillers I was drawn by virtue of the authors reputation and that the novel is essentially a character driven examination of the new beginnings that the Black Death heralded for many. The pestilence did much more than simply claim the lives of swathes of men; it also created a series of religious, social and economic upheavals. None was more important than that of bringing down the prevailing social hierarchy, handing bondsmen their freedom and putting a man's destiny in his own hands. Indifferent to class distinctions, taking whomever it chose, the Black Death put lords on equal footing with serfs and along with peril came opportunity. This comprehensively researched novel adheres to the widely known facts of the pandemic but Minette Walters vividly brings the story to life by examining the profound effects on the lives of the inhabitants of Develish, Dorseteshire.

When the Black Death entered England through the port of Melcombe, Dorseteshire in June 1348 little was known about the sickness or how it would transform the landscape. The third day of July, 1348 sees the imperious Sir Richard of Develish preparing to leave his demesne and travel to Bradmayne in the hope of securing a marriage for his petulant fourteen-year-old daughter, Lady Eleanor. Rumour has reached Develish that potential suitor, Lord Peter, has succumbed to the return of a childhood illness and with a dowry in tow, Sir Richard and his retinue depart. With no love lost for Sir Richard from either the two-hundred serfs tied to his fealty or from his intelligent and humane wife, Lady Anne, Develish exhales a collective sigh of relief as he leaves. More worthy than her husband in every sense, Lady Anne sees no distinction between serfs and lords and after being educated by nuns from the age of six she is both literate and conversant with the benefits of sanitation, treating and isolating the sick. Since her arrival at Develish as a fourteen-year-old girl

she has steadily assumed the running of the demesne, all without the egotistical or lustful Sir Richard any the wiser. However, the altogether clearer sighted bondsmen are well aware and have been the direct beneficiaries of her efforts. Within Sir Richard's retinue his wife has embedded her friend and ally, Gyles Startout, an elevated serf and a devoted man who is her eyes and ears on travels with her feckless husband.

When Sir Richard returns early from his travels with news that Lord Peter is gripped by the pestilence, he himself is already ailing and to his fury Lady Anne makes the decision to exile him outside of the moat surrounding Develish. Whilst popular misconception and the uneducated see the sickness as a punishment for sins, readily subscribed to by dissolute priest Father Anselm, Lady Anne remains coolly sceptical. She is something of a heretic, who sees survival not through beseeching God but through isolating the sick, pooling resources and working together. Accepting the wrath of her spiteful daughter and with Sir Richard dead within days, the bondsmen of Develish readily look to Lady Anne who unites the demesne and abolishes the prevailing social order. Stepping up to the role of steward is base-born Thaddeus Thurkell, a swarthy looking giant pilloried by stepfather, Will, and inciting the fury of the poisonous Lady Eleanor for the scant attention he pays her. Short on words, his education and imposing physicality make him a natural choice for steward but few appreciate it at the time as Sir Richard's steward, the meddling Master Hugh de Courtesmain is relieved of his position.

As the months pass and food stores run low the enforced claustrophobia of Develish gives rise to petty gripes, infighting, boredom and madness in the case of Lady Eleanor. Frustrated by the lack of knowledge of the world outside Develish, it is Thaddeus Thurkell who sacrifices himself for Develish and Lady Anne and leads a ragtag group on a mission through the disseminated villages outside the demesne to secure provisions and bring news. What follows is an immersive account of the treacherous recce undertaken by Thaddeus weaved alongside the continuation of life in Develish. Darkly atmospheric, *The Last Hours* is infused with a sense of menace as tensions threaten to spoil over and fear runs rife at the future that lies ahead. Not only is Develish vividly drawn, but the ravaged villages beyond as Thaddeus and his gang are met by fetid corpses and rat infestations and in addition have their eyes opened to the potential for a future freed from and outside of the demesne of Develish.

"To Black Death promised freedom to anyone who survived it. With so many dead, serfs skilled in farming would be prized once lords became desperate to have their fields ploughed and planted: and their need would give men and women the chance to bargain themselves out of bondage and demand payment for their work.... From being the most despised of people, peasants would become the most valued, for without their labour no Lord would be able to keep and govern his demesne."

The Last Hours is a searing testimony to the courageous triumvirate (Lady Anne, Thaddeus Thurkell and Gyles Startout) who dedicate themselves unflinchingly to keeping the scourge outside of their confines. As the threesome go to increasing lengths to ensure the fragile accord holds Minette Walters gives life to a memorable cast, from churlish Lady Eleanor, shrewd Thaddeus who leads by example, the self-sacrificing Gyles Startout to the quiet sensibility and sharp wit of Lady Anne. Genuinely gripping this sprawling tale takes its readers to the beating heart of the community of Develish, and Walters draws many of the leading serfs and their families (Trueblood, Startout, Buckler, Catchpole) into the narrative, making the reader privy to every part of the drama. Full of intrigue *The Last Hours* succeeds in evoking one of the most perilous period in medieval history. With some of Lady Anne's principal relationships given greater emphasis (Lady Eleanor and Thaddeus Thurkell), Walters succeeds in putting her character under the microscope and my admiration for a heroine, saviour and true leader of people goes unparalleled.

Whilst Minette Walters could have opted for the altogether more people pleasing introduction of a romantic element into the denouement, she instead leaves her story rather open-ended for the monumentally more ambitious continuation of this saga and I shall be alongside the fellows of Develish every step of the way. An education in itself, I doubt I would have been so thoroughly held in thrall by a sterile recounting of the Black

Death, but *The Last Hours* captures the very essence of the period in a first pumping and expansive character led story of resilience and fortitude.

With thanks to Readers First for providing a copy of this book in exchange for an honest and unbiased review.

Miriam Smith says

I've been a follower of Minette Walters' books for some time now and constantly enjoyed reading her many entertaining and intriguing novels. She has a unique writing style and I always loved how she incorporated newspaper/media articles into her many stories. Therefore I was very excited to hear she had written an historical fiction novel, as this has been a genre I've been more and more enjoying of late.

Sadly, I was quite disappointed in 'The Last Hours' and ended up skipping some pages in order to get to the end. I found it slow and dare I say boring? It's still expertly written as expected and Minette has chosen a very interesting time in history to write about but unfortunately it just didn't do it for me. There are some very strong characters throughout the story, I particularly liked Lady Anne and Thaddeus and all of the characters were well thought out and appropriate to the time setting of the book.

I imagine a lot of research must have also been carried out about the Black Death and the fourteenth century in England and the author has done a really good job conveying all this into her story.

Although not for me this time, I will continue to read books by Minette Walters in the future and I expect that this beautifully printed book will still be hugely popular and well liked and I wholeheartedly wish her every success with it.

2.5 stars

Brenda says

June 1348, and Sir Richard and his entourage were away from their home of Develish when the Black Death struck – thought to be brought to England's shores by sailors, it was an enemy no one knew how to combat. But Sir Richard's wife, Lady Anne, had her own thoughts – reared by nuns, she knew to isolate the sick from the well, and she set to close their community off to anyone travelling past; even her own husband and his men were stopped from entering.

The moat enclosed the manor house with both serfs plus Lady Anne and her daughter Eleanor inside. Thaddeus became Lady Anne's right-hand man as both were literate where others were not. Lady Anne's knowledge and way with words, her calm manner and serenity, kept her people happy and secure in a land filled with fear and terror.

Even as the people of Develish remained healthy, their food stocks were running shockingly low. The continued guarding of the perimeter against bandits and concern for the future of the people had Thaddeus making the decision to discover what was happening outside their boundaries. Taking the young sons of the leading serfs of the village, he ventured forth – but would it be into the horrors of the pestilence - or worse? Lady Anne of Develish had many worries on her shoulders; her lack of knowledge of the outside world was one of them.

The Last Hours by Minette Walters was a thoroughly enjoyable historical novel which shows the strength of some, and the lack of foresight of others. The cleverness and simple way of doing something which was

quite obviously extremely difficult, not to mention traumatic, showed, especially in Lady Anne's compassion and understanding of her serfs. Beautifully written, *The Last Hours* is one I highly recommend, and although I had no idea when I started this novel (all 555 pages of it!) that there is a sequel to follow in October 2018, I'm looking forward to continuing Lady Anne, Gyles and Thaddeus' story.

With thanks to Allen & Unwin for my ARC to read and review.

Maureen says

It's the year 1348, and the little port of Melcombe in Dorsetshire will become known as the place where the sickness 'The Black Death' began.

No one knows the reason for this sickness, how and why it spread so quickly or why it killed so many. The church is happy to preach that God is the reason behind it - that it's a punishment for sins and wickedness.

Lady Anne of Develish thinks differently, she is something of a rare female in this period in history, in that she is well educated, astute, and completely literate, something which her husband Sir Richard is not! He is not only illiterate, but he's also a brute of a man.

Sir Richard is away seeking a husband for their daughter Eleanor (A whole book could be written about Eleanor - sadistic, spoilt, petulant, you get the picture - very much her father's daughter). Whilst he's away, news arrives of the pestilence that's spreading through the villages, one by one. Lady Anne isn't interested in people's confessions of sin and misdeeds, she believes the way to keep this dreaded sickness away from Develish is to isolate themselves from the rest of civilisation, combined with a strict level of hygiene. She gathers her people inside the moat surrounding the Manor House, and refuses entry to all, including her husband Sir Richard. However, in doing so, she makes an enemy of her daughter Eleanor, and nobody wants to make an enemy of Eleanor!

This imposed isolation made for a compelling read, as the claustrophobic confines of the Manor House brought about all manner of madness and fear. Matters only got worse as the meagre rations of food became even more limited. Because of the geographical restraints of confinement within the boundaries of Develish, the storyline relies heavily on its characters to bring the story to life, and the author managed to carry this out particularly well with some truly memorable characters. She was at great pains to illustrate the inequality of this period, where serfs were of little value other than to work to their deaths, whilst the power of the ruling classes was paramount, and everything they surveyed was theirs for the taking.

It was a story about the fragility of life, humility, and sharing with others regardless of class or status. Minette Walters has produced a very welcome addition to the historical fiction genre with this excellent book.

Thank you to Netgalley and Atlantic Books, Allen & Unwin for my ARC in exchange for an honest review

Sara says

I received a copy of this book in exchange for an honest review.

In *The Last Hours* we find ourselves in the village of Melcombe, Dorset 1348. The Black Death has taken Britain, and all - old or young, rich or poor, are subject to its whim. Many believe it is a curse sent from God, but Lady Anne has other ideas. Raised by nuns, she has the foresight that could save her household - by barring the door to the sick and isolating them from everyone else. But how long can the survivors stay isolated when food stock dwindles and tempers fray?

This is such a well researched novel, of an extremely compelling period in history. The author has clearly done her homework and this shines through. It's incredibly detailed in its description of the infrastructure and hierarchy present at this time, from the gentry to the working serfs - which is invaluable information as the story progresses. It has left me desperately seeking out more information with regards to this part of British history I have little previous experience of.

The characters are also wonderfully complex. Lady Anne, our leading lady, defies her station and her upbringing to befriend the serfs of her lands - teaching them to read and treating them as something other than slaves. Because of this they have a deep sense of loyalty towards her, and she has a deeper understanding of their plight. This leads to Lady Anne having an innate need to protect them and help them when the plague comes, bringing them into her fold within her home. Eleanor her daughter, by comparison is volatile and self-centered. Similar in nature to her father, a brute who Lady Anne does not love or respect. As the story progresses we see Eleanor descend into madness as a mirror to Lady Anne's unbreakable will to survive.

This is really an intimate look at an almost apocalyptic society, as social constraints fall away within such a confined space. Paranoia and mistrust run rampant, and we see these characters forced to come to terms with each other, and share everything they have. The tension at times is palpable. I enjoyed the section where a 'party' goes out beyond the walls of their sanctuary in search of other survivors and food, as the serfs realise that such a catastrophe could actually lead to their freedom. It was a real turning point in the novel.

My only real issue with this was the pacing. It was incredibly slow at times, and as such it took me a long time to get through this as I got distracted and yearned for a little 'action'. At times I was desperate to know what was going on outside of the walls our characters were confined by, and I struggled to keep reading. This is at heart a character novel. The characters define this world and compel the story along. I just wish the editing at times could have been a bit more cut-throat.

Linda says

"All has been looted, betrayed, sold; Black Death's wing flashed ahead. (Anna Akhmatova)

A plague, beyond all human proportions of the imagination, seeped into the lives of all in 1348. Death knows no social standings, no rankings. It snuffs out the life of one who wears the weight of the crown as well as those who plow the rake of the fields. A devilish betrayer of the pure or the wicked of heart.

Lady Anne of Develish in Dorsetshire has bid farewell to her husband Sir Richard. Sir Richard and his band of men carry a well-guarded trunk filled with the dowry of his daughter, Lady Eleanor. They are heading to broker the final elements of the pending marriage between Eleanor and Peter Bradmayne. News has reached them that Peter may be ill. After several nights of serious drinking and feasting, Peter no longer joins the group. It is then that Richard is informed by his captain of arms that illness has befallen the town and it has become a place of death. The troupe of men and their horses make haste to return to the castle. The death toll includes Richard and his band of men. Only one survives.

Meanwhile, back at the castle.....

Lady Anne refuses to admit the returning men inside the castle. Lady Eleanor screeches like a barn owl at the injustice to her dying father. But Lady Anne realizes that they will all die if she opens the gates. Gyles Startout, the sole survivor, is banished to the shore along the moat for two weeks to prove that he will not infect them. It's now a waiting game.

Minette Walters introduces us to a myriad of characters that form the solid bulk of this storyline. We meet Thaddeus Thurkell, a twenty year old bondsman, who assists Lady Anne in her efforts to bring cleanliness into the lives of the serfs who have taken refuge inside the castle. The tension builds by leaps and bounds as their minds work in unison to form a barrier between themselves and the impending plague. We also see the true colors of Lady Eleanor who, indeed, is her father's daughter. Evil begets evil.

Meanwhile, outside of the castle.....

Thaddeus Thurkell and a small group of young male serfs take to the road to secure more food and supplies in the outer areas. This is high adventure and provides an open door to the next book in the series. (The Turn of Midnight) Lady Eleanor must easily fit a length of veil to cover her horns and hooves. That girl alone is worth the price of admission, folks.

The Last Hours is a glimpse into the horrors of the Black Death through the eyes of all levels of society. It is a known fact that between 30% and 50% of the country's population died because of the plague. Minette Walters gives us a bird's eye view from all ranks of social order and her character choices are an excellent vehicle in which to deliver this sharp-ended storyline. Can't wait for the next edition to get here.

I received a copy of The Last Hours through NetGalley for an honest review. My thanks to Allen & Unwin Publishers and to Minette Walters.

Carol ?? says

2.5☆ - very weak, pallid stars.

From my status updates;

February 10, 2018 – page 76

13.89% "Love the cover& good beginning, but it is starting to feel like a 21st century woman has been transplanted into 14th century England. Walter's writing style is very readable though, so let's see how I get on! :)"

February 11, 2018 – page 166

30.35% "Really flat characters - you are a good guy or a bad guy, there is no in between."

February 15, 2018 – page 316

57.77% "The story now is quite good, but the pace is ponderous, the characters still one dimensional & so much telling not showing... I've officially hit skim mode now - & that only because it's a giveaway win - the last one I'm likely to get."

I think that covers pretty much everything, except that the story did pick up for a while around the 70% mark

before a ridiculous denouement and then an ending which really wasn't. Because this isn't a standalone book, it is the first in a series. Since there is nothing on the cover to indicate this is the first in a series this feels like a bit of a cheat. You do find out at the end of the book as there is announcement that in October 2018 a followup will be coming from Minette Walters, followed by a fragment of writing. I don't know if this was the start of the second part of the book - I was too annoyed to care by then.

I would like to thank Allen & Unwin & Goodreads for sending me a second copy of this Giveaway after the first one went missing in the mail. This was exceptional service from both companies - I only wish I liked the book better.

Susan says

“A Black Death has fallen upon our land...”

I have never read anything by Minette Walters before, but am aware she is best known for writing crime novels. As such, this is something of a change for her, being historical fiction. In fact, in a way, this is almost a modern dystopian novel, set in the historical setting of 1348 amidst the sweeping plague of the Black Death.

It is set around the household of Sir Richard of Develish, who, when we meet him, is preparing to travel to visit Bradmayne in Dorsetshire, to seal the marriage of his fourteen year old daughter, Eleanor, with Peter of Bradmayne. It is fair to say that Eleanor is not much enthralled by the thought of her marriage – in fact, the spoilt, vicious and supremely unlikeable Eleanor, is never pleased by much at all. While the convent raised Lady Anne believes in duty and education, Eleanor thinks only of herself and idolises her brutish father.

Lady Anne has no love for her husband and has given him no heir. Mostly, she avoids him as much as possible; using her keen intelligence to help protect the serfs, to teach them to read and to educate them about rudimentary health care. This means that, although the serfs fear Sir Richard, they respect, and trust in, Lady Anne deeply. So, when Lord Richard and his party encounter the plague on their trip, it means the villagers follow Lady Anne's plan to isolate the people and keep them safe from the plague.

What follows is a fascinating look at a community, with many characters at odds with each other, isolated in a land teeming with death. There are personal animosities, the tension between Normans and Saxons, the role of the Church, the enlightened Lady Anne set against the fear, ignorance and superstitions of the time and many secrets, which emerge over time. There is also a great depiction of a society which falls apart, as plague lays waste to the countryside. There is obviously, at least one more book planned, as a sequel to this one and so this novel has no definite ending. However, it is certainly a very interesting read, with some excellent characters and a great sense of place. I received a copy of this book from the publisher, via NetGalley, for review.

Ova Incekaraoglu says

Year 1348...The black death spreads over England.

In the countryside, there lives an extraordinary women for the time being: Lady Anne Develish. She has a useless husband, and a very up-in-the-air young daughter. the whole responsibility of the well being of the estate and her people falls on Lady Anne's shoulders. In the mission to survive, she will befriend a slave called Thaddeus Thurkell...

Lady Anne's uncommon decisions and actions will soon have consequences.

I really enjoyed reading this book. Lady Anne is unforgettable. She is quite extraordinary and full of wit. Glad to find out this is a series and I am looking forward to read the next one in this series.

Trudie says

I am starting and flinging away books like a crazy person right now. Millennial pop culture memoir - gone. Giant doorstopper about the Black Death, closed with a hefty sigh and frown. Has my reading radar gone on the fritz ? am I trying too hard to take a break from capital L literary fiction ? I don't know whatever it is, its not working out !

This should have been good, I did really want to read a kind of medieval dystopia with boils but historical fiction is a dicey proposition and this one had anachronisms galore, two dimensional characters but worse even than those sins, it was boring. Unforgivable for a book I was treating as a mildly diverting historical romp.

Hilary Mantel maybe you could step in here, or you know hurry up and finish *The Mirror and the Light*

Phrynnne says

I have read quite a few books by Minette Walters, all of them dark, disturbing crime novels. I would rate her as one of my favourite crime writers and now she suddenly turns to Historical Fiction! But that's okay too because I like HF and Walters is a talented writer. She could probably write anything she chose.

The Last Hours is unquestionably a good book. The period in England surrounding the Black Death is always interesting (try Doomsday Book by Connie Willis) and Walters wrings it for every drop of blood and gore, probably due to her more normal fare of crime writing. The best feature of the book is its characters. They are well rounded and realistic and eventually the reader comes to really care what happens to these people, especially Lady Anne and Thaddeus.

The author must have done a huge amount of research to produce 555 pages of intensely readable fiction. I enjoyed it very much indeed but found the ending odd. It appears we will be continuing the story of the people of Develish in 2018 - apparently a duology, if not maybe even a series! I was surprised but not in a bad way.

Beata says

To begin with, I woud like to thank HARLEQUIN - MIRA (US and Canada) and Netgalley for allowing me to read this novel in exchange for an honest review.

I wanted to read this book since I have read several non-fiction books on the Black Death. I was curious how this topic could be dealt with in a novel. The Author did an exceptionally thorough research into the pestilence which arrived in England in 1348. In fact, what prompted her to write this particular novel was the very fact that she lives in Dorset, not far from the place where the plague arrived. All historic details are fantastic: the symptoms, the ways people tried instinctively to avoid the Black Death or even some simple ways to bring relief to those who were affected by the plague. The reader can feel quite comfortable regarding the atmosphere of the place. Ms Walters chose a small village of Develish as the place of her plot, although some of her characters travel around the shire and witness the tragedy-struck countryside. There is a plethora of characters which allows the Author to introduce the thinking that prevailed in those days and describe everyday life in the Middle Ages in the English countryside. And there are secrets, which are necessary ingredients for a good mystery. The book reads well, although I could not stop thinking that the language is too modern and at times Lady Anna, Eleonora and Thaddeus express opinions which could hardly be expressed six hundred years ago. It may be a trick on the side of the Author or perhaps indeed rebellion and unorthodox ideas were not that rare then.

All in all, an interesting historical novel that I can wholeheartedly recommend to the fans of the genre.

Diane S ? says

In the past, Walters has written some chilling and intense thrillers, but it has been ten years since her last full length published novel. In this one she turns her extensive talent to a well researched historical. There is still a suspicious death, in fact there are many deaths as this book tackles the horrifying and world altering, Black Death.

The year is 1348, and Sir Richard is traveling to another demense in order to negotiate a marriage for his daughter. He will never return home, nor will many accompanying him except for the baseborn serf Gyles. Lady Anne, a very wise and fair Lady, takes charge and in defense of this plague brings all serfs inside the enclosure and seals off the entries and exits. Her daughter, who despises her mother, despises the serfs, may be, after the plague, her mothers greatest enemy. There are secrets here that come out within the story, and some fascinating characters, fascinating history. A social parable as the Black Death changes the socio economic make up of the country. Religious aspects., as many back then thought only sinners would be stricken, and those in God's favor would be spared. A strong woman character, whose strength of purpose, and ability to act was not common during this time period. I adored this character, as well as Gyles, Thaddeus and Isabelle.

I understand this will be one of three in this historical trilogy, in fact, this one ends on a cliffhanger. So, now I wait. Fans of Karen Maitland's Company of Liars, will enjoy this as will fans of general historical novels. The Black Death killed so many, was such a frightening time in history.

ARC from Netgalley.

Marialyce says

4.5 ever engrossing stars

The Black Death was a devastating global epidemic of bubonic plague that struck Europe and Asia in the mid-1300s. Estimates vary, but the Black Death may have killed one-half of Europe's population, and about 100 million people worldwide.

If you love the blend of history with characters of long ago, this book will certainly be one you will be wanting to delve into. The black death, a killer disease, spread through and carried by fleas on rats was the background of this tale. We are introduced to the people who through the foresight and effort of Lady Anne, a brilliant well loved character, strives to save her small village of Develish. Residing in this town, are a cast of wonderful and devilish characters who bring to the reader the full extent of knowledge about the perils of life during this tragic time in Europe's history.

Lady Anne's husband is a scoundrel and his ugly deeds catch up to him eventually. Lady Anne had a daughter, Eleanor, with her husband, and she is as devious and cunning as her father, hating her mother and the two hundred or so serfs who live in Develish. In particular, her wrath is directed towards Thaddeus Turkell, a serf whom her mother has placed her faith in and his adventures with other young serfs provides another aspect to the story.

It was a frightening time, quarantined from the outside world, unsure of what was happening, the villagers rely on Lady Anne and each other for their support. The village priest is a cur and he is useless to the people, but they eventually learn to rely on their resiliency and will to survive.

I so enjoyed this journey into a time that has always fascinated me. The black death decimated the population of Europe. This book provided a wonderful insight into the time that was beyond awful as people succumbed to this disease in a manner that was both painful and horrible. No one was immune. Twenty five million lost their lives, over one hundred million worldwide. I do recommend this book to all those who love historical fiction at its most telling. A caution though, this is the first book and the next will not be out to October of 2018. I can't wait!

Thank you to Minette Walters, Mira Books, and Netgalley for a copy of this engrossing tale. My reviews can be found here: [https://yayareadslotsofbooks.wordpres...](https://yayareadslotsofbooks.wordpress...)
