



What's Eating Gilbert Grape

By Peter Hedges

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A sad, comic and gruesome first novel featuring a dysfunctional family in Iowa. As small-town claustrophobia presses on the family, just about everything is eating Gilbert Grape - until the appearance of a mysterious young beauty from Michigan begins to change everything.

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What's Eating Gilbert Grape By Peter Hedges Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Wonderfully entertaining and amusing, this distinctive first novel goes down like a chocolate milkshake but boasts the sharpness and finesse of a complex wine, for Hedges's ostensibly country-bumpkin-style tale sparkles with sophisticated literary devices and psychological insight. Twenty-four-year-old Gilbert Grape sacks groceries in small, monotonous Endora, Iowa, pop. 1091 ("Describing this place is like dancing to no music"). Fear of leaving Endora, loyalty to his disintegrating family--particularly to obese, TV-addict Momma and goofy younger brother Arnie, "the retard"--and disgust over the technological wave of the future which is destroying the town's values have turned Arnie into "a walking coma practically." As Momma's overeating becomes suicidal and Arnie nears age 18, Gilbert is jostled out of his paralysis and into honest self-examination. The colloquial narrative voice, dialogue, colorful cast of characters and even the theatrically staged scenes are conveyed with appealing credibility. Like John Updike, Hedges invests an antihero's ordinary provincial American life with thematic meaning, fashioning the details of everyday existence into clever literary symbols. He leaves readers demanding a sequel. BOMC alternate.

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From Library Journal

Grape is 24 and stuck in a rut. Trapped by feelings of responsibility to his eccentric family, he works bagging groceries in their small Iowa town. And what a family! At its core lies his beached whale of a mother; she never leaves her TV chair and clamors constantly for more food and cigarettes. There is Ellen, his maddeningly pubescent sister; 17-year-old retarded brother Arnie, whom Gilbert loves dearly; and his older sister Amy who devotes herself to keeping everyone happy. Gilbert is saved by a beautiful and strange girl who startles him into life. That such a creature would take an interest in an apparent loser like Gilbert requires the reader's willing suspension of disbelief; but with such appealingly funny writing, one is only too happy to oblige. Highly recommended for fiction collections.

- *Sheila Riley, Smithsonian Inst. Libs., Washington, D.C.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

An ever-so-gentle coming-of-age story--a saccharine Last Picture Show--that almost smothers the evident talent of its author in an overdose of pop culture. At 24, Gilbert Grape is the sentimental favorite in Endora, Iowa, a good boy still bagging groceries in the local market. But he's not happy: he's mired in an affair with the insurance agent's wife, and outraged by the supermarket chains and burger franchises that are devouring Endora's soul, as well as the loyalties of Gilbert's friends. Most of all, Gilbert hates being put-upon by his grotesquely mediocre family: fat Momma, who eats and sleeps in her chair by the TV; saintly Amy, who's given up everything for Momma except her Elvis fetish; insufferable Ellen, a typically self-involved teenager; Larry, the vanished brother; Janice, the psychologist-cum-stewardess. The only gem in the lot is Arnie--the retarded brother whose 18th birthday is approaching--and who functions both as plot device and provider of tear-jerking dialogue. Every time Arnie does something retarded, like hiding in the town water tower or disrupting a parade, Gilbert bails him out. He enjoys playing the white knight, but as Becky, the new girl in town, intuits, Gilbert has yet to learn Life's Deeper Lessons--such as how to say goodbye, how to love, and how to cry. Suffice it to say, he does all three things by the end of this tale. But despite Arnie's eventful birthday, Momma's expiration, and her cremation in the hated family house, there's hardly any serious effect on the reader's emotions or intellect. Too predictable and too dependent on pop culture to achieve indelibility--but a first novel that does manage to impress with its playwright author's sense of form and craft. Hedges turns a nice phrase; in fact, all that's lacking here are content and nerve. -- *Copyright*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Zola Campbell:

Do you have favorite book? If you have, what is your favorite's book? Publication is very important thing for us to learn everything in the world. Each book has different aim as well as goal; it means that book has different type. Some people sense enjoy to spend their time to read a book. They may be reading whatever they consider because their hobby is actually reading a book. Why not the person who don't like looking at a book? Sometime, man or woman feel need book if they found difficult problem or perhaps exercise. Well, probably you will require this What's Eating Gilbert Grape.

Joseph Cosgrove:

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Jimmy Stone:

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Johanna Land:

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