



# The Signature of All Things: A Novel

By Elizabeth Gilbert

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## The Signature of All Things: A Novel By Elizabeth Gilbert

**A glorious, sweeping novel of desire, ambition, and the thirst for knowledge, from the # 1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Eat, Pray, Love* and *Committed*. Look out for Elizabeth Gilbert's newest book, *Big Magic: Creative Living Beyond Fear*.**

In *The Signature of All Things*, Elizabeth Gilbert returns to fiction, inserting her inimitable voice into an enthralling story of love, adventure and discovery. Spanning much of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the novel follows the fortunes of the extraordinary Whittaker family as led by the enterprising Henry Whittaker—a poor-born Englishman who makes a great fortune in the South American quinine trade, eventually becoming the richest man in Philadelphia. Born in 1800, Henry's brilliant daughter, Alma (who inherits both her father's money and his mind), ultimately becomes a botanist of considerable gifts herself. As Alma's research takes her deeper into the mysteries of evolution, she falls in love with a man named Ambrose Pike who makes incomparable paintings of orchids and who draws her in the exact opposite direction—into the realm of the spiritual, the divine, and the magical. Alma is a clear-minded scientist; Ambrose a utopian artist—but what unites this unlikely couple is a desperate need to understand the workings of this world and the mechanisms behind all life.

Exquisitely researched and told at a galloping pace, *The Signature of All Things* soars across the globe—from London to Peru to Philadelphia to Tahiti to Amsterdam, and beyond. Along the way, the story is peopled with unforgettable characters: missionaries, abolitionists, adventurers, astronomers, sea captains, geniuses, and the quite mad. But most memorable of all, it is the story of Alma Whittaker, who—born in the Age of Enlightenment, but living well into the Industrial Revolution—bears witness to that extraordinary moment in human history when all the old assumptions about science, religion, commerce, and class were exploding into dangerous new ideas. Written in the bold, questing spirit of that singular time, Gilbert's wise, deep, and spellbinding tale is certain to capture the hearts and minds of readers.

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## Editorial Review

### Amazon.com Review

**An Amazon Best Book of the Month, October 2013:** As a small girl, Elizabeth Gilbert scrawled her name in the most extraordinary book in her house: an original illustrated folio of Captain Cook's voyages. Decades later, her parents discovered her signature and gave her the book, reigniting her passion for scientific exploration in the century leading up to Darwin's theory of evolution. She became fascinated with the women—always wives or daughters of scientists—who made their own discoveries, in spite of the cultural constraints that kept them from true exploration. Her invented heroine, the insatiably curious Alma Whittaker, daughter of a scrappy botanical baron, spends most of her life confined to her family estate in Philadelphia, yearning for a life of greater passion and liberty. She channels her desires into botany, thrilling to the miniature universe of moss in the forests surrounding her house, developing a new taxonomy that becomes a theory encompassing all living things, parallel to Darwin's. When she finally turns herself loose on the world, it's to claim her place in a lineage of explorers. An earthy, elegant, deeply sensual novel of daring breadth and imagination, *The Signature of All Things* gives us the cosmos in the life of one woman, in her worlds within worlds. —*Mari Malcolm*

### From [Booklist](#)

**\*Starred Review\*** Gilbert, the author of the phenomenally successful memoir *Eat, Pray, Love* (2006), returns to fiction with her first novel in 13 years, and what a novel it is! Taking her sweet time and digressing at will into areas ranging from botany to spiritualism to illustration, she tells the rich, highly satisfying story of scholar Alma Whittaker. Born to Henry Whittaker, "the richest man in Philadelphia," who rose from his station as the son of a lowly gardener to an import tycoon, Alma has the benefit of wealth and books, spending hours learning Latin and Greek and studying the natural world. But her plain appearance and erudition seem to foretell a lonely life until she meets gifted artist Ambrose Pike. Their intense intellectual connection results in marriage, but Ambrose's deep but unorthodox spiritual beliefs prevent them from truly connecting. Alma, who has never traveled out of Philadelphia, embarks on an odyssey that takes her from Tahiti to Holland, during which she learns much about the ways of the world and her own complicated nature. Gilbert, in supreme command of her material, effortlessly invokes the questing spirit of the nineteenth century, when amateur explorers, naturalists, and enthusiasts were making major contributions to progress. Beautifully written and imbued with a reverence for science and for learning, this is a must-read. **HIGH-DEMAND BACKSTORY:** The publisher is pulling out all the stops for the high-profile author, including both print and online campaigns and an author tour; Gilbert's celebrity may also draw off-the-book-page interest. --Joanne Wilkinson

### Review

"A rip-roaring tale... unlike anything Gilbert has ever written... Its prose has the elegant sheen of a nineteenth-century epic, but its concerns... are essentially modern." —*The New York Times Magazine*

"With this novel about a young, nineteenth-century Philadelphia woman who becomes a world-renowned botanist, Gilbert shows herself to be a writer at the height of her powers." —*O, The Oprah Magazine*, "Our Favorite Reads of the Year"

"The most ambitious and purely imaginative work in Gilbert's twenty-year career." —*The Wall Street Journal*

"Like Victor Hugo or Emile Zola, Gilbert captures something important about the wider world in *The*

*Signature of All Things*: a pivotal moment in history when progress defined us in concrete ways." —*The Washington Post*

"A masterly tale of overflowing sensual and scientific enthusiasms in the nineteenth century." —*Time*, "Top Ten Fiction Books of the Year"

"Raucously ingenious... a novel of brave and lovely ideas... I found unshackled joy on every page." —*The Chicago Tribune*

"Alma's extraordinary life unspools like a Jane Austen novel... Here Gilbert claims her rightful spot as one of the twenty-first century's best American writers." —*Outside*

"Gilbert writes so wonderfully it's impossible not to swoon... Alma's drive for personal epiphany feels absolutely contemporary." —*The Boston Globe*

"A beautifully written, grandly expansive historical novel... Gilbert's writing is so smart and richly drawn that it does what all the best books do: it sweeps you up." —*Entertainment Weekly*

"Dazzling... a big-hearted, sweeping, unforgettable novel... If you don't think science or historical fiction can be bright, funny, and engaging, this novel will quickly prove you wrong." —*The Miami Herald*

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Jennifer Phinney:**

Why don't make it to become your habit? Right now, try to ready your time to do the important act, like looking for your favorite publication and reading a publication. Beside you can solve your problem; you can add your knowledge by the book entitled *The Signature of All Things: A Novel*. Try to the actual book *The Signature of All Things: A Novel* as your friend. It means that it can to become your friend when you experience alone and beside that of course make you smarter than ever. Yeah, it is very fortunated for you. The book makes you much more confidence because you can know almost everything by the book. So , we need to make new experience along with knowledge with this book.

#### **Lisa Rice:**

Have you spare time for a day? What do you do when you have a lot more or little spare time? Yeah, you can choose the suitable activity to get spend your time. Any person spent their very own spare time to take a go walking, shopping, or went to often the Mall. How about open as well as read a book allowed *The Signature of All Things: A Novel*? Maybe it is to become best activity for you. You understand beside you can spend your time along with your favorite's book, you can cleverer than before. Do you agree with it has the opinion or you have some other opinion?

#### **Leslie Bergeron:**

The reserve untitled *The Signature of All Things: A Novel* is the publication that recommended to you to

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**Carolyn Treece:**

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