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**THE INFLUENCE OF TRAUMATIC PAST EVENTS
ON GILBERT GRAPE'S PERSONALITY
IN PETER HEDGES' WHAT'S EATING GILBERT GRAPE**

A THESIS

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**ENGLISH DEPARTMENT
FACULTY OF LETTERS
AIRLANGGA UNIVERSITY**

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A THESIS**

Submitted as Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements For the Sarjana Degree
of the English Department Faculty of Letters Airlangga University Surabaya



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***This thesis is dedicated to
Allah SWT,
My Beloved Family and Fellows***

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ABSTRACT

Nurrahmi, Alfawzia. *The Influence of Traumatic Past Events on Gilbert Grape's Personality in Peter Hedges' What's Eating Gilbert Grape.* Submitted As Partial Fulfillment of the Requirement for the Sarjana Degree of English Department, Faculty of Letters, Airlangga University

The word "*personality*" is often used to compare one person from another. There might be more than one or two persons who have identical physical appearance, but it would be impossible for them to have identical personality at the same time. This essence part of human beings often determines a person's chance of success in life, as in found in the famous sentence: "*It's not about what happens to you, but what you do with what happens to you*". A person's happiness also depends on his or her paradigm in seeing life. Nothing is perfect in this life, but life would be such a blessing for those who have high spirit, hope, and motivation to reach their goals. On the opposite, life would be a nightmare or a curse for those who always see it in negative perspective. This happens to Gilbert Grape, the main character in Peter Hedges' *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*. Gilbert is a perfect description of a young man who feels disappointed and unhappy with his life. Everything around him does not seem to be enjoyable: his quirky family that everybody knows, his boring and go-nowhere job at the corner store, and his weird relationship with an already married woman. Even though the burdens are unbearable, Gilbert keeps staying there and lives his monotonous life day after day. He does not know what to do with his life. Above all, he does not know what he really wants. The future seems to be a blurred vision for him.

This study aims to reveal Gilbert's complicated personality and what lies beyond it. It is based on the theoretical background asserting that there must be some reasonable explanation behind someone's personality, which may root from what happened to him or her in the past. Therefore, this study uses psychological approach especially by using the personality theory supported by psychoanalysis theory proposed by Sigmund Freud, one of the major psychologists in the twentieth century. The analysis puts stress on the *anxiety* of the character and the *self-defense mechanisms* he develops in order to develop his ego. This study uses qualitative approach by identifying factual phenomenon in the form of description of various problems faced by a fictional character. The analysis finds that the negative side of Gilbert's personality is not only caused by his compounding problems at the present moment, but also influenced by his childhood experience. He was humiliated by his elementary school teacher when he peed during class. When he went back to his house, he found his father already dead of committing suicide. Both of the past events have brought Gilbert in such a traumatic condition and resulted in his depressed mood, which is signified by his anger and sarcasm. Hopefully, this study could bear understanding of how the traumatic past contributes to shape human's personality and raised our awareness and empathy towards such problem.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

In this world, so many people are born. With a great uncountable number of their existence, no one of them has the same personality or characteristic in such a precise way, even though they are born as identical twins. This condition makes it possible for people to differentiate each other since each person has his or her own unique features or personality. According to psychology as the offspring of philosophy and experimental physiology, “personality” represents the essence of man and refers to that part of individual that is most representative of him, consisting of what is most typical and deeply characteristic of that person (Hall 8-9).

There are many factors that shape the personality of a person. Among them, genetics, environment, and personal reaction are the three main factors in the development of human’s mind, which is very influential for personality development (Anderson 332). However, one’s personal reaction toward various problems in his or her life has greater significance than other influences. In this case, it depends on what a person has experienced during his or her life. As a result, it cannot be separated from the dimension of time.

In general, people usually divide the dimension of time into past, present, and future. There are various paradigms believed by the people in seeing those three-divided concepts of time. Some people might say that the past and the future

are just illusion, since what they are facing and experiencing now is the present moment. They believe that life begins today; when they open their eyes and start the new day. Meanwhile, some people might have strong connection with his or her past and reach an extreme condition as to call them “living for the past”. Some others might have a strong vision for their future, for tomorrow. For them, the word “foreground” is more preferable than the word “background”. There is also another moderate and wiser opinion about how we should see our time, which is represented by a simple anonymous sentence that says, “*learn from yesterday, live for today and hope for tomorrow.*”

Despite the simple sentence, dealing with the past or what has happened is not always easy to do. A person will find some difficulties in “*learning from yesterday*” if he or she does not want to admit his or her own past wisely. There are various reasons why people are reluctant to look back at their old memories from the past. A good example for such case can be found in a novel entitled *What’s Eating Gilbert Grape* (WEGG). WEGG was written by Peter Hedges in 1991. Peter Hedges himself is one of the Hollywood’s prominent scriptwriters. He was born in Iowa, United States of America, in 1965. At the moment when the novel WEGG was being written, he lived in New York with his wife, Susan.

The novel WEGG tells about Gilbert Grape, a twenty-four years old man who has been living most of his entire life in Endora, a small inert town in Iowa, America. While most of his friends have left Endora to reach their ambitions and dreams, Gilbert seems to be stuck in there, living his life with day-to-day orientation and seems to be in the “go-nowhere” existence.

Gilbert spends his days by “babysitting” Arnie, his eighteen-year-old retard brother, buying cigarettes for Bonnie, his “huge” mother, who has been eating nonstop since his husband hung himself in the basement seventeen years ago, and stocking shelves and delivering groceries for a local store, Lamson’s Grocery, whose business has been deserted by the new supermarket in town. There are also Amy, Gilbert’s thirty-four-year old sister adoring the late Elvis Presley, who takes almost all their household responsibilities herself, and the little sister Ellen, a sixteen-year-old girl which is known as the prettiest girl in town. whose selfishness often makes Gilbert sick and quarrels with. Actually, there are two other Grapes left: Janice, twenty seven, living in Chicago as a stewardess and visits them every so often, and Larry, thirty two, who only returns home once a year on the same day which is at Arnie’s birthday. Only their monthly checks to their family signify their still being parts of the “Famous Grapes of Endora”.

Everybody in the town knows them and their “history”. This unordinary family who no longer goes to church since Albert Grape, the father, killed himself, is such a phenomenon in Endora because of their quiriness. However, if we examine the novel further, we will figure out that Gilbert’s problems do not only come from what he faces at the present moment. The burdens that shape his personality into such an introvert, pessimistic, sarcastic and skeptic person also rooted from his traumatic past events, which happened at the time when Albert Grape, his father, hang himself in the basement of their house. The little Gilbert who was just seven years old and who has now grown up into a young adult does

not realize that what he experienced at the very moment would influence his personality.

Basically, Gilbert Grape's personality can be understood psychologically. In psychology, it is explained that human's failure in facing their difficult problems often brings out the unexpected new problems mainly concerning with the psychological side of humanity such as wounds, fears, guilty desires and unresolved conflicts. In this thesis, I would like to analyze Gilbert's personality by examining his condition at the present moment and the influence of his traumatic past events. This study is based on the assumption that Gilbert's trauma has given a great account in shaping his character, not merely his present concrete problems as what people tend to assume. As the analysis unfolds, we will see whether or not this assumption reliable enough to answer the statements of the problems.

B. Statement of the Problems

The following points are the problems that are about to be discussed within the analysis:

1. What kind of personality does Gilbert Grape have as depicted by his characterization at the present moment?
2. How have the traumatic past events contributed in shaping Gilbert Grape's personality?

C. Objective of the Study

Regarding the statements of the problem, the aims of the thesis analysis will be:

1. Describing the personality of Gilbert Grape as seen in the depiction of his characterization at the present moment
2. Figuring out how the traumatic past events have contributed in shaping Gilbert Grape's personality

D. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study on Peter Hedges' *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* is to contribute valuable insights towards the major character in the novel and the problems faced by him which root from his traumatic past during childhood. This sort of work is, indeed, a fiction in literary form. However, it may portray and reveal some important things in our real life that are sometimes neglected or ignored, be they intended or unintended. Specifically, this study intends to emphasize that actually every people are struggling for their lives. By understanding human's problems by means of using *psychological approach*, particularly the *personality* and the *psychoanalysis theory*, it is expected that our insights and paradigms towards this area will be opened wider.

E. Scope and Limitation

There are some limitations in contriving the thesis analysis in order to gain a comprehensive analysis. The intended work here will be a novel by Peter

Hedges, an American author and one of the Hollywood's prominent scriptwriters, entitled *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*. The study will be focused on the character of Gilbert Grape and what he experienced in the past. The other aspects in the novel are possible to be examined as long as they have correlation with the topic discussed and needed to give further explanation on the analysis.

F. Theoretical Framework

Some theories and approaches are needed to support the analysis of this thesis. In addition, related studies will be attached to provide useful information concerning with the analysis. The theories that are about to be applied in this thesis analysis are *Beginning Theory: An Introduction to Literary and Cultural Theory* and *Modules on Freud's Psychoanalysis*.

According to Peter Barry in *Beginning Theory*, Psychoanalytic Criticism, the unconscious is the part of the mind beyond consciousness that nevertheless has a strong influence upon human's actions. This major idea of Sigmund Freud puts stress on the *repression*, which is the 'forgetting' or ignoring unresolved conflicts, unadmitted desires or traumatic past events, so that they are forced out of conscious awareness and the realm of the unconscious. The repressed material is then promoted into something grander or disguised as something 'noble' (97). This theory will be the fundamental basis in analyzing the literary work.

While the above theory is used to deeply understand the character's personality, which is Gilbert Grape, the *Modules on Freud's Psychoanalysis* as well as some theories about personality will be helpful to explain the process of

the *self-defense mechanisms* undergone by Gilbert Grape and thus might explain the background of his personality.

G. Method of the Study

1. Corpus

The corpus of the study is Peter Hedges' debut in his novel entitled *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, which was printed by Poseidon Press in New York City in 1991. This book was also taken into semi-dramatic film released in 1993. It was directed by Lasse Hallström and written by Peter Hedges, based on his own novel. It starred Johnny Depp (Gilbert Grape), Leonardo DiCaprio (Arnie Grape), Darlene Cates (Bonnie), and Juliette Lewis (Becky).

2. Method of Data Collection and Analysis

The main source of the analysis is the novel *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* (WEGG). The procedures of the study is by making data compilation on the novel, firstly by having a close reading, classifying the data and determining the data based on the criteria. The criteria meant here is the data containing what I would like to analyze.

In terms of the method in conducting the analysis, the descriptive analysis will be applied to figure out the answers of the problem statement. The character analysis is something inevitable in this thesis and thus requires any important information about the character. In this thesis, qualitative research is the method needed to conduct such analysis.

H. Definition of Key Terms

There are several key terms used in this thesis to help in guiding the analysis. The following are the key terms along with the meaning of them:

1. *Anxiety*: emotional condition in which there is fear and uncertainty about the future (Oxford Dictionary)
2. *Personality*: state of being a person; existence as individuality (Oxford Dictionary)
3. *Pessimistic*: the tendency to expect or believe that the worst outcome is most likely to happen of everything; that everything is essentially evil (Oxford Dictionary)
4. *Trauma*: a painful experience that sears us psychologically (Oxford Dictionary); if someone's anxiety cannot be abated, if the truth hidden by repression comes out before someone's conscious self in a manner he or she cannot either disguise nor handle, then he or she is in crisis, or trauma

CHAPTER II

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this chapter, the theories that are used to analyze the novel *WEGG* will be presented in a deeper level of explanation. It will be divided into two major parts. The first part discusses about the psychological approach which contains the types of personality. This approach will be helpful in analyzing the character of Gilbert Grape. The second part discusses about the psychoanalysis theory that will explain the background of the character's personality, also as the specific means to have a valid examination on the analyzed work.

A. Psychological Approach

Psychological approach means going deeply into the thoughts of the characters.

(Carter and Mc Rae 160)

In *Theory of Literature*, it is stated that there is a term in literature in connection to psychology called psychology of literature, which comprises of four understandings (Wellek and Warren 78). The first is about psychological study of the writer as type and individual. The second is about the study of creative process involved within the work, while the third is about the study of psychological types and laws presented within the works of literature. The fourth is about the study of the effects of literature upon its readers (audience psychology). In this thesis, I only make use of the third understanding specifically towards the character element since there is no sufficient source to support the study based on the other

understandings. As a matter of fact, there is also a suggestion to avoid the emergence of *genetic fallacy*, or the tendency to value literary works through the creative process and/or through the artist who creates the work (Hardjana 61). It should be noted that once a literary work is accomplished, it appears as a “free” creature which values does not depend on the creative process or even the existence of its own author.

It has long been known that psychology has given its great influence both in analyzing and criticizing literary works, especially in the twentieth century era, with the psychological and anthropological concepts offered by several major figures such as Freud, Jung, Adler, and Brill (Heiney 492-493). According to Heiney, the fulfillment of the individual personality can be attained only if the individual’s complete physical, mental, and spiritual development is allowed. Therefore, literature ought to portray the morbidity and frustration that arise through repression of natural instincts, and should as well depict the perfection of personal fulfillment possible under condition of freedom. From the above explanation, we can assume that the characters in literary works can be identified as real “human”. Therefore, personality theory can also be applied in analyzing fictional characters, especially by examining the characters’ behavior in their empirical or observable events (Hall 17).

1. Types of Personality

Actually, there is no single classification to define personality types. Psychologists have made several classifications based on various features. Because of his or her complexities, a person may carry with him or her more

than one or two types of personality. The followings are some examples of personality types (Smalley, online):

a. Personality types based on a person' preferences:

- Dominants: persons who prefer doing something
- Expressives: persons who prefer talking
- Analyticals: persons who prefer thinking
- Solids: persons who prefer relaxing

b. Personality types based on a person's special temperament:

- Sanguines: persons who tend to have lots of fun but accomplish little
- Melancholies: persons who tend to be organized and charted but not very cheerful
- Choleric: persons who tend to be set to lead but impatient that no one will follow
- Phlegmatics: persons who tend to have a peaceful world but not much enthusiasm for life

c. Personality types based on a person's tendency in using their sensors and/or intuitive:

- Intuitive-Thinkers "The Analyst"

These people are imaginative and analytical, making decision with their head more than with their heart. They value intelligence, competence, and formal education. They are idea-oriented, critical, less appreciative and less grateful.

- Intuitive-Feelers “The Emphatist”

These people are romantic, individualistic, spiritual, idealistic, caring, appreciative, passionate, and expressive. They tend to make decisions on a personal basis rather than on logical one. For them, truth and personal authenticity really matter.

- Sensing-Perceptive “The Realist”

These people are sensible, practical and flexible. They have a great need for being in touch with life physically, either through their work or play. Taking risks and bending rules are their tendencies. They have difficulties in planning, time management, punctuality, and formal organization.

- Sensing-Judges “The Legalist”

In this group are people who are sensible, practical and organized. They have a great need and respect for authority, schedules and structure in life. These people resist change in society, preserve traditions, enforce laws and customs and maintain systems wherever they are. They tend to be serious and conservatives. Others perceive them to be pessimistic. Rigidity and Inflexibility are also their main problems.

B. Psychoanalysis Theory

The origin of personality theory actually owes much more to the medical profession and to the exigencies of medical practice. An individual's personality

is assessed by the effectiveness with which he is able to elicit positive reactions from a variety of persons under different circumstances (Hall 8-9). As a note, personality itself can develop as a dynamic thing. This theory was proposed by Sigmund Freud, who emphasized the developmental aspects of personality and in particular to stress the decisive role of the early years of infancy and childhood in laying down the basic character structure of the person. Extremely, this father of psychoanalysis believed that “the child is father of the man” (Hall 45).

Basically, personality develops in response to four major sources of tension: (1) physiological growth processes, (2) frustrations, (3) conflicts, and (4) threats. As a direct-consequence of increases in tension emanating from these sources, the person is forced to learn new methods of reducing tension. This learning is meant by “personality development”. However, there is identity and continuity involved through time in an individual that is viewed as a structured entity with defined contents.

In *A Theory of Personality Change*, there are several factors which explain why an individual is as he is, how he has become so, and how these factors maintain him so, despite circumstances, fortunes, and opportunities (Gendlin, online). Such explanatory concepts of content and structure tell us what prevents an individual from being changed by experience, what factors will force him forever (by definition) to miss or distort everything that might change him unless his personality changes first. Therefore, the term “developing” becomes more logical and acceptable instead of “changing” in explaining personality, since there is actually no real changes or brand new things.

In efforts to resolve his frustrations, conflicts, and anxieties coming from various threats, an individual can benefit from the method of “identification” and “displacement” (Hall 45). Identification itself may be defined as the method by which a person takes over the features of another person and makes them a corporate part of his own personality. The tension can be reduced by modeling behavior after that of someone else, as what we see in the identification of a child from his parents in his early childhood for they appear as omnipotent to him. Most of this process takes place unconsciously and not with conscious intention.

Different from identification, displacement happens in condition when an original object-choice of an instinct is rendered inaccessible by external or internal barriers (anticathexis), which causes the formation of a new cathexis unless a strong repression occurs. Another displacement will take place if the new cathexis is also blocked and it will only stop until an object is found, which yields some relief for the pent-up tension.

1. Anxiety

In Freud's *psychoanalysis theory* (Barry 97, Hartono 2-3), human's *psyche* (level of personality) is divided into three divisions as the followings:

- a. *id*: the unconscious (having chaotic features; seeking pleasures and reducing tensions; related to biological impulses and inherited genetically)
- b. *ego*: the consciousness (motivated by the reality principle, seeking the fulfillment of the id with the best solutions by using the ratio)

c. *superego*: the conscience/the borderline of the ego and the *superego* (the representation of various values and norms, having the capability to consider which is bad/good; related to self control and motivated to reach self esteem and pride).

Human being consists of a whole energy sistem used by the *id*, the *ego*, and the *superego* at the same time. As a result, the different interests between each personality level and the limitation of the energy provided will result in conflicts (Hartono 21). Fortunately, humans are endowed by some instincts to serve their *psyche* need. The general instincts consist of the *eros* or the life instinct (to keep survive and preserve their next generation which is represented by love and sex) and the *thanatos* or the death instinct (to hurt or diminish others/they themselves which is motivated by hatred, frustration, etc.). Humans' inability in controlling these instincts will bring them into *anxiety*.

In such case, anxiety is one of the states of tension that is produced originally by external causes. When anxiety is aroused, it motivates the person to do something. Anxiety that cannot be dealt with by effective measures is said to be *traumatic*. It reduces the person to a state of infantile helplessness. According to Freud, there are three kinds of anxiety: (1) *Real Anxiety*, or the anxiety towards a certain object or real danger in the external world with which our fear has a mutual degree, (2) *Neurotic Anxiety*, or the fear toward our own uncontrolled instincts which may cause the person to

do something for which he will be punished, and (3) *Moral Anxiety*, or the fear toward our own conscience.

2. Self-Defense Mechanisms

To cope with various kinds of anxieties as stated above, an individual usually develops some mechanisms known as *self-defense mechanisms*. These mechanisms are such natural things developed by a person in order to protect the completeness of her/his ego, both from the internal and the external threads. It is a process by which we protect ourselves from awareness of our undesired and feared impulses. These mechanisms represent an unconscious mediation by the ego of id impulses that are in conflict with the wishes and needs of the ego and/or superego. By altering and distorting one's awareness of the original impulse, one makes it more tolerable since they are one of our ways of distancing ourselves from a full awareness of unpleasant thoughts, feelings and desires.

Self-defense mechanisms come into several stages, which apply differently in different person or situation. The general stages comprise of:

a. *Repression* (the blocking of unacceptable impulses from consciousness).

Another form of repression is *denial* (the refusal to accept reality and to act as if a painful event, thought or feeling did not exist)

b. *Projection* (the attribution of one's undesired impulses onto another). It can also be considered as *compensation* (a process of psychologically counterbalancing perceived weaknesses by emphasizing strength in other arenas)

- c. *Reaction Formation* (the wishes or impulses that are perceived to be dangerous are converted into their opposites)
- d. *Displacement* (the stage in which a person redirects his or her thoughts, feelings, and impulses from an object that gives rise to anxiety to a safer, more acceptable one). It can be reflected in the form of dreams and/or imaginations, which is called *fantasy*, as the channeling of unacceptable or unattainable desires into imagination. The higher form of displacement is called *sublimation* (the channeling of unacceptable impulses into more acceptable outlets).
- e. *Rationalization* (the cognitive reframing of one's perceptions to protect the ego in the face of changing realities).

The mechanisms above can be considered as continuative stages in personality building. However, they can also be taken as partial levels. A person does not necessarily have to develop all those stages completely. He or she might perform only several mechanisms depending on his or her own situation and condition. Therefore, self-defense mechanisms are said to be very relative and conditional in their practice.

CHAPTER III

ANALYSIS

In this chapter, the analysis will be divided into two parts. The first part discusses about the personality of Gilbert Grape as seen in the depiction of his characterization at the present moment. This part will examine it from the aspect of Gilbert's family condition and his affair with Mrs. Betty Carver. Meanwhile, the second part deals with the traumatic past events happened to Gilbert, which were the humiliation from Mrs. Brainer, his ex-teacher, and the suicide of Albert Grape, his father, that have contributed in shaping his personality.

A. Gilbert Grape's Personality

According to Abrams (20), characters are the people who are performed in a narrative work or drama with which the reader predicted to have moral quality and certain tendency in what is expressed in their utterances and their actions. A character in literary work can be revealed by several basic means. The means that may contribute to the revelation of a character are to mention about his action, his speech, his thoughts, his physical appearance and what other characters say or think about him (Shaw 71). From the above means, a character can be divided into two general classifications, which are flat character and round character. The flat character is described to have simpler characteristic than the round character, which is more complex in its characterization.

There are many parts within WEGG that can describe what kind of character Gilbert Grape really is. The very title of the work itself can be a worthy clue to grasp what the author wants to say to its readers. *What's Eating Gilbert Grape* is an idiom indicating that there is something wrong within Gilbert's life that leads to his sufferings and unhappiness. That "*something*" seems really burdensome for him and is vividly shown in his characterization.

In WEGG, Peter Hedges as the author has successfully created Gilbert Grape as a soulful character and dramatized his inner conflict, especially by positioning him as the narrator of the story with which the readers see, feel, and empathize what he thinks, feels, and does. By using Gilbert's point of view, Peter Hedges gives the readers some informative "puzzles" about what happened in Gilbert's past, along with the dreams he experiences and some bizarre "scenes" that he often imagines. If all of those puzzles are united, they will enable the readers to understand his personality wholly. In this subchapter, Gilbert's personality will be discussed firstly by examining his condition at the present moment, which is seen from his family condition and his affair with Mrs. Betty Carver.

1. The Condition of Gilbert Grape's Family

In WEGG, the readers might conclude that the controlling theme of the story is about dedication toward family, which is represented by Gilbert's loyal dedication toward the Grape family. The general theme or the subject matter of the novel is, indeed, about family matter. In his first debut as a novelist, Hedges

presents us with a portrayal of an unusual family. The term “unusual” here suggests that the Grape family is not like other common families in some respects. This family consists of only a mother and her six children for the father has died seventeen years ago because of suicide. Despite the tragedy befallen on Albert Grape, the father, this family has to continue their lives. Meanwhile, since losing her husband, Bonnie, the mother, has become obsessed with eating nonstop and confined to only their house. Bonnie’s extreme obesity becomes a hot gossip for the neighbor and they often relate it to Albert’s suicide. The embarrassment is added with the retarded Arnie’s who needs constant supervision from the other family members, unless he will cause some problems such as climbing the water tower and resulting in troubles.

This situation becomes more complicated since there is no enough cooperation between the other Grapes that inevitably causes an imbalance within the family. Larry and Janice move to other cities and have their own lives. It leaves Amy, Gilbert and Ellen as Bonnie’s children who can still give contribution for the family. Amy manages almost all the household needs and she seems to ignore her own personal needs. Gilbert works at Lamson’s Grocery and makes a little money to support the financial of the family, while Ellen does part-time job at an ice cream shop and spends the rest of her time having fun and dating with some boys.

It is obvious that Gilbert is dissatisfied with his family, let alone in such an isolated place like Endora, with only 1,901 populations. In a place where gossips and rumors spread very quickly, Gilbert’s family surely cannot be

included as an ideal one. The Grape children have no parental figure to respect with. They no longer have a father figure to protect and lead the family. They have neither an ideal mother figure to take care of them, who is loving and warm. Besides that, this family often runs out of financial support and they have to live in a rumbling house that is non-conducive to have a good living. That is why Gilbert often dreams about the kind of families he used to watch on TV when he was still a kid (44).

Gilbert's disappointment grows bigger every time he looks at his family. This twenty-four-year old man hates hypocrisy beyond everything and his own family is not an exception. He sees Janice and Ellen as "*phoney girls*" who are "*great only when they have an audience*" (114). Larry might not be a fake actor in Gilbert's eyes, but he pays very little attention to the family and only minds his own business. Gilbert thinks that Larry is a coward who escapes from the bitter reality. It is toward Bonnie, Amy, and Arnie, that Gilbert still seems to have some sincere respect. Yet, Gilbert is really disturbed by his mother's condition. He cannot stand watching Bonnie eating on and on without realizing that the wooden floor beneath her chair is starting to curve. Besides that, Bonnie never knows that the family spends much money just to buy her food, snacks, and cigarettes. This former beauty of Endora has become an elephantine legend and Gilbert feels ashamed with this humiliating fact. To express his hatred, Gilbert often picks rude words such as "*walrus*" and "*Lochness Monster*" to refer to his own mother even when he talks with his friend, Tucker (131).

Moreover, the house of the Grapes is always messy and stinky. Garbage and rubbish are everywhere. Gilbert has no time to clean the house because he has to work and takes care of Arnie. Amy is already tired with everything else while the lazy Ellen cannot be asked for help. Therefore, there is always *“something wrong at home”* (28) in Gilbert’s mind.

2. Gilbert’s Affair with Mrs. Betty Carver

The second important fact about Gilbert is his romance with Mrs. Betty Carver, the wife of a local insurance agent in Endora. The affair was started seven years ago when Gilbert had just graduated from high school. Unlike his other classmates, Gilbert did not go to college. Instead, he *“stayed and studied Mrs. Carver”* (101). Betty Carver herself is a mother of twin boys who has felt frustrated with her sour marriage. As compensation, she tries to seek for another enjoyment. She found it in Gilbert, who has been *“her honey, her secret, her little toy”* (110). Betty Carver’s rash sexual demands have placed much apprehension on Gilbert. They have a routine schedule for their secret meetings. All she has to do is calling Gilbert when her husband is out for work. Along those years, Gilbert has never gone on a date with any other girls except with her. Betty Carver becomes Gilbert’s **one** and the only lover. This affair has contributed in Gilbert’s introvert attitude in public places.

Gilbert’s aimless affair has continued until he sees Becky at Ellen’s workplace. Becky is a fifteen years old girl from Michigan who spends her summer holiday with her grandmother in Endora. Not **only** is Gilbert attracted

to her natural beauty (51), but also for her mysterious behaviors. Becky loves hanging around the town with her bicycle and does not seem to care with many people who admire her beauty. Wherever she goes, the males will stare at her, including Gilbert. When Gilbert stares at her, she says:

“You think I’m beautiful. I might be now, but one day I’ll have blue hair and blotched skin and plastic teeth and maybe one breast left. If the thought of that appeals to you, then we might talk about hanging out. But if you’re into the surface thing, the beauty thing, then I might just have to turn around, snap off your head, and eat you.” (52)

Since the very first sight, Gilbert always tries to get close to her. Becky finally accepts to go out with him. They spend much time together by doing simple activities such as having breakfast, walking around the town, etc. The more times they spend, the better Becky knows about the real Gilbert. She never feels hesitate to criticize him. At first, Gilbert gets disturbed and outraged with Becky’s questions and her spontaneous, honest comments about him. In Becky’s opinion, Gilbert is “*out of touch, out of sync*” (268). She suggests him to have “*feelings*”. Gilbert should try to see, accept, and love himself (241) unless he will forever suffer from unhappiness.

Day after day, Gilbert learns a lot of things from Becky. He begins to look at his own *self* with a new paradigm and clarity. It is Becky who teaches him to consider that “*it’s the inside that counts*” (52), not the superficial

things. Having touched by Becky's meaningful words, Gilbert starts to reconsider about many things in his life including his relationship with Mrs. Carver, which is only based on sexual orientation. He finally realizes that he has only been "used" as a satisfying *object*, not as an equal partner or subject:

I wish I could get clean from my days with Mrs Carver. I wish

I could wash it all away so that my first kiss would be Becky.

(151)

Soon after that, Gilbert decides to end his affair with Mrs. Carver. He begins to open his mind and heart for other "healthier" relationship, which he hopes will be with the young Becky from Michigan.

Through both of the aspects above, which are the condition of Gilbert Grape's family and his affair with Mrs. Betty Carver, we can get a description about Gilbert's character. It can be seen in the way he thinks, speaks and acts. The judgments given by the other characters can also explain Gilbert's character or personality.

First of all, Gilbert rarely speaks what he thinks, but only keeps it in his mind (32). If he does speak, the words that come out from him are often cynical, even though it is said in a flat tone. Instead of using literal words, Gilbert also tends to use metaphors to refer to the condition around him. As an example, he says, "*At least something likes us,*" when his sister, Amy, complains about the existence of so many ants in their house (42). By uttering that statement, Gilbert indirectly shows that the Grape family is not really favorable in their society. In

fact, their family receives only a small number of visitors coming to their house that happens in a very little frequency. That is why Gilbert compares it paradoxically with the existence of the ants that can be found everywhere in their house. While the neighbors have no interests to visit the Grapes' house and tend to avoid them because of their bad "track records" (Albert's suicide, Arnie's mental disorder, Bonnie's obesity, the Grapes' dirty house, etc.), the ants are on the contrary attracted to come there for the dirt (the bad things) in their house. The ants as animals surely do not have any comprehension on the Grapes' problems as humans do. What is bad for the neighbors is "good" for the ants.

Another example that shows how cynical Gilbert is can be seen in the way he gives unpleasant comment when he sees his little sister, Ellen, wears lip gloss:

"Lip gloss. What's wrong with lip gloss? Everybody's wearing it."

"Arnie wears it? And Momma? And the Byers twin? And Lance Dodge? No, no, no. Don't think so."(117)

Gilbert prefers giving hyperbolized statement to natural response only to make her sister feels irritated. He himself seldom gives compliment if not necessary, especially to those whom he is not really fond of. Therefore, once he does it, it will be such an unbelievable thing for the people around him (314).

Because of the adaptations that they have made, people generally tend to like or at least accept the things that prevail around them, such as family, friends, or the town where they live. The opposite thing can be found in Gilbert. For him, "*Family, Endora, and Jesus Christ*" are "*the ugliest words*" (165) that often irritate his feeling.

Gilbert does not believe in any religion even though he is described as a Christian. He merely sees religion as a status since people oftentimes do contradictive things with the teachings in their religion. As an example, much killing and lovemaking have been done in the name of Christ, but the sins that have been made seem to be neglected easily. In Gilbert's view, Christians are more apt to sway from "the path" because they can always forgive themselves (232). The conversation between Gilbert and one of his neighbors named Mrs. Metford below shows how great is Gilbert's allergic toward religion:

Mrs. Metford smiles. "Gilbert, turn to God. Turn away from false idols, prophets. God loves you. He always has."

"Well, tell him thanks anyway."

"God forgives you your sins."

I say right back, "And I forgive him his." (144)

At that time, Mrs. Metford makes a visit to Gilbert's house in order to bring the Grape family back to God. The Grape family itself has never gone to church for years. We see here that Mrs. Metford's effort does not work successfully. Convincing Gilbert to have faith in God is such a wasteful thing. Instead of showing his respect toward the woman's advice, Gilbert purposefully makes fun of God as if He were just another human being like he himself.

Gilbert's response for Mrs. Metford is surely a controversial thing, let alone to happen in a conservative society like Endora, where religion is taken as one of the respected norms that have to be maintained consistently in every day's

life. Even though the compliance does not always run perfectly, breaking the prevailed laws in religion values is considered taboo and shameful if it is performed blatantly in public areas. God, prophets, and other religious figures or symbols are such sacred and sensitive things so that mocking or harassing them will be an improper and unacceptable behavior. However, Gilbert does not seem to care about other people's opinion. In Endora, a city where its most populations are known as "*Jesus-loving Christians*" (145), he proudly declares that he is a nonbeliever. He cannot receive the idea of irresponsible God who has created "Life" that is full of unfairness (31).

Gilbert's perspective about life and living might be very different from the common ones. He thinks that living is no one person's fault. In Gilbert's thought, some people might say that human beings choose to be born. They make out some request and it is granted. That is why they are put on earth because they want to be alive. On the other side, Gilbert sees that life and living is only a matter of luck of the draw (204).

Gilbert spends much of his time by thinking or pondering rather than doing something, talking, or relaxing. He might not have a good academic background, yet he can be considered as an *analytical* person if seen from this preference. We should not refer it to the term "analytical" in any scientific area, but more on the perception that Gilbert tends to analyze everything around him, from the small things until the great phenomena.

However, classifying Gilbert from his temperament is rather difficult. We might say that he is *melancholic*. He does not perform things in such an organized

or charted way, but he runs his daily activities regularly. Despite of the bore, he keeps working in Lamson's Grocery, buying cigarettes for his mother, doing the laundry, and taking care of Arnie, his retard brother. Over the years, Gilbert's technique in doing his activities has become "*so automatic, so natural*" (97) that he does not need to think about what he is doing anymore. On the other side, as a person who avoids having open conflicts with the people around him, Gilbert can also be said as *phlegmatic*. He almost never debates. If he does not agree with something or someone, he will only show it by his non-cooperative attitude. It is not because he looks for some peacefulness, but because of his lack of enthusiasm in life.

Based on the tendency to use his intuitive, we can put Gilbert in the *Intuitive-Thinker* categorization. It is clearly depicted that Gilbert is such an imaginative, critical, and idea-oriented person, even though he is less appreciative. Meanwhile, Gilbert can also be categorized in the *Sensing-Judges* ("*The Legalist*") group based on his sensor tendency. Gilbert obviously tends to resist change by maintaining his habits and customs. For others, he might be perceived as pessimistic, rigid, and inflexible. Janice, Gilbert's other sister, says a statement that supports that fact on the way home when Gilbert picks her up from an airport:

You're the only one, Gilbert, who defies all kind of definition or comprehension. You don't travel, you don't read, you don't expand yourself. You play it safe in all things and I've never known if it's because you're scared or if it's because you're just lazy. You need

to examine your life on a deeper, more honest level. You don't know what you want and it shows. (176)

The important thing to note from here is that a character might have complicated characteristics as in found in Gilbert's personality. At first glance, he seems like a flat character. He rarely speaks and only does small actions. However, later on we find him as a thoughtful, critical, and sensitive person. In some occasions, his actions are often unpredictable. We can see it in the last part of the story, when Gilbert finally decides to burn the corpse of his mother inside the house as a form of respect towards her. In this part, Gilbert's real feeling to his mother is revealed:

“SHE IS NO JOKE! THEY'LL LAUGH AT HER AND POKE AT HER AND JUDGE HER! DO NOT LET THEM DO THAT! SHE DESERVES BETTER!

Amy tries to hug me, but I flinch. **“MOMMA IS BEAUTIFUL AND NOBODY IS GOING TO LAUGH! NO LAUGH!”** (332)

Even though Gilbert seems to be a hard-hearted son while his mother was still alive, he actually loves her so much that he cannot stand seeing other people humiliate her. Therefore, it will be more reasonable to classify Gilbert as a round character. Unfortunately, Peter Hedges does not describe Gilbert's physical appearance clearly so that the character's personality with his outer look cannot be compared and analyzed.

B. The Traumatic Past Events of Gilbert Grape

In the previous subchapter, Gilbert's personality has been discussed and analyzed by examining the condition he faces at the present moment. According to *Sixteen Personality Types* (online), Gilbert can be defined as an analytical and melancholic-phlegmatic person. At the same time, he is also an intuitive thinker and a legalist. There must be some reasons that can explain why he has become so. In this subchapter, the background of Gilbert's personality will be revealed by analyzing another important aspect in his life. This aspect is the traumatic past events that happened to Gilbert when he was still a child.

Apparently, the complication of Gilbert's life is not only caused by what he faces at the present moment, as in his problems with his family and Mrs. Betty Carver. What makes Gilbert becomes the kind of person who is "*out of touch, out of sync*" and "*cruel*" as what Becky says (268) can also be traced back by examining what he experienced in the past. There are several parts of the novel where the readers can get worthy information about Gilbert's childhood that has hurt him deeply:

I had uneasy feeling about my Dad. Had to get home. Momma was in Motley with Arnie for tests. Found out he was retarded that August. I had a sick feeling. That morning my dad had been in good spirits. He had been all smiley and picked me up by my ears. Larry said on way to school that Dad was happy. I had this sick feeling and made plans to run home during recess. But I had to pee

so I squeezed my legs so hard. It was 8 minutes till recess when I wet my pants. L. Dodge told Mrs. Brainer. I cleaned it up while others went outside. Autopsy determined that about the same time my Dad was hanging himself. (169-170)

Gilbert writes down those words on a blackboard in his old classroom when he and Becky make a visit to his elementary school, one day before the building is burned down. The words above indicate two important events that happened in Gilbert's childhood. The first event was the moment when Gilbert peed on his own pants during class which made him receive the humiliation from his teacher, while the second event was the death of Gilbert's father, which happened at the same time with the first event.

Several days before, it is told that Gilbert went to the town's cemetery where his father was buried. He did not go to visit his father's grave but went to another grave where his ex-teacher named Mrs. Brainer had been buried the day before. Instead of putting some flowers or praying for her, Gilbert urinated her grave.

We can see here that Gilbert still cannot forget and forgive what Mrs. Brainer did to him even until seventeen years have passed. By urinating Mrs. Brainer's grave, Gilbert manages to make a "revenge" on her; something he could not do when he was still a kid. When Mrs. Brainer held the position as a teacher, Little Gilbert had no power to break the rules against her. As a very young child, he could only obey her and accept what she did to him helplessly. Gilbert's

position at that time was weak. He has to wait for years to make an indirect “revenge” on Mrs. Brainer. Even though Mrs. Brainer is already dead now, Gilbert feels satisfied for being able to do what he once wanted to do. He nevertheless feels that the repay towards Mrs. Brainer is still not equal, because the person is already dead and no longer able to feel humiliated and hurt as what he felt. That is why Gilbert spoke to himself that “*My only regret is that I didn't pee on Mrs. Brainer while she was alive*” (96).

To see if the very moment has contributed significant account on Gilbert's personality, we need to refer to *psychoanalysis theory* proposed by Sigmund Freud. This theory shatters the common (familiar) concepts of time and succession that separates past, presence, and future, and introduces an “uncanny” complication of time (Zeeb 38). A certain ‘incident’ in the past becomes visible or manifest only later. There is always *delay* and *belatedness* until the repressed feeling of the incident appears to the surface. The later repetition shapes the past and brings it into being. However, the repetition can never repeat the same.

In the age of seven or when he was still in second grade, Gilbert experienced a humiliating moment. It happened when he sat in a puddle of his own piss and his teacher made him clean it up in front of his classmates. What makes it worse, he got his father already dead by hanging himself in the basement when he went back home. However, he was not seen upset or crying at the funeral. Nobody can even remember the last time he cried since then (171).

In this case, it can be said that Gilbert has developed the *self-defense mechanisms* without noticing it. The mechanisms do have two basic

characteristics, which are *unrealized/unconscious* and *denying-remaking-changing* the form of the reality (Hartono 21). The incident that happened seventeen years ago is such a threatening memory that hurts Gilbert's ego. The feeling of guilty and embarrassment is still felt by him until now. Therefore, he tries to bury it deep down in his unconscious mind. He wants to appear as a strong person that is signified by his toughness when attending his father's burial. Even though he was very sad at that time, he decided not to cry or show his true feeling. This is called *repression*, as another form of *denial*. He acted as if the painful event did not exist. This is one of the most primitive of the defense mechanisms because it is the characteristic of very early childhood development.

After repressing his bad memories, Gilbert tries to project his own unbearable impulses (*projection*). For him, it is his family—not he himself—who needs help, support, and protection. Bonnie, Arnie, Amy, and even Ellen, need him there. Since Larry and Janice left the house, Gilbert becomes the unofficial caretaker of the Grape family. He never leaves Endora because he thinks that they could not manage without him (124). This is actually the way Gilbert copes with his *moral anxiety*, which is his fear for not being able to protect his family.

However, we can see that Gilbert's attitude and behavior are contradictory with his real feelings (*reaction formation*). What he shows outside is different from what he feels inside. He does not pretend to be happy with his life. Yet, he does not want anybody knows that he has been worn out so far. He is tired and bored but he acts as if there were nothing to worry about him. He says words that people want to hear, not what he really wants to say. Gilbert does things that he

does not really intend to do. It is not because he wants to please others, but he just wants to avoid troubles. Gilbert has grown up with the hatred over everything around him, including himself. Since he is not able to do anything else, he just shows it in his cynical or sour words.

The way Gilbert displaces his hatred might reduce the tensions he faces. Another form of Gilbert's *displacement* is reflected in some of his dreams and imaginations, which is called *fantasy*. Gilbert once dreams that he and the whole family members gather in a restaurant where they all look happy and harmonious as an ideal family. This kind of fantasy can actually protect one's self esteem. When educational, vocational or social expectations are not being met, one imagines success in other areas and wards off self-condemnation.

After passing the stage of displacement, a person tends to channel his or her unacceptable impulses into more acceptable outlets. It is called *Sublimation*. In this aspect, Gilbert displaces his impulses into something grander or noble (Barry 97). He implements it by protecting Arnie, his retarded brother whom he regards as the most innocent and weakest person in his family:

I put up with a lot. My sisters, my mother, this town. I will endure anything. But one thing I will not allow. No one hurts Arnie.

I will kill for that kid. (88)

Gilbert will get extremely angry if someone hurts Arnie. He is not only Arnie's brother, but also the retard's "*best buddy*" (88). He plays with him, bathes him every afternoon, and cleans him up from the dirt around his face. Arnie is the

major reason why Gilbert cancels his decision to leave the house and endures his stress:

“Don’t leave, Gilbert.”

“Sometimes a person has got to break loose, get away from...”

“But you stay, promise? You stay here now. Promise?” (259)

Gilbert’s burdens are hard enough to push him doing suicide like what his father did, but he cannot forget the presence of Arnie whose life depends much on him. The other family members might manage without him, but that retard “*who cries because he killed a grasshopper*” (131) surely cannot. This comprehension has occupied Gilbert’s mind deeply and becomes his major consideration in making decision on what he will do with his life.

While Gilbert has no father figure to identify with, he has appeared as a “father” for Arnie. Many people in Endora often say that Gilbert is the one in the family who is very similar with Albert Grape, his father. He was once known as a compliment giver and the most hopeful man that ever lived in town. However, a father who committed suicide is not an impressive thing for Gilbert. He objects to be compared with an irresponsible man who left his family. Gilbert blames him for causing the family’s imbalance. Had his father not committed suicide, Bonnie would not get stressed and obsess with eating nonstop. Had he not left the family, the Grapes would still have a father figure to protect them and Gilbert does not necessarily have to stay in Endora for his entire life. He could have moved to other town and had a better life. This is called as *rationalization*. This stage is also known as the rational explanation for the person’s failures or guilt. On this level,

Gilbert takes the role as the family leader and unconsciously makes identification with his late father.

In some respect, Gilbert's hatred toward God can be regarded as another form of rationalization. God (Jesus Christ) holds the absolute power to change human's fate. If He really loves His creatures, then why He lets some people live in happiness and makes the others live in suffering. It becomes Gilbert's fundamental question in the aspect of faith. Gilbert wishes God to create other destiny for him. Gilbert wonders why there could be a success person like Lance Dodge, his ex-classmate who has now become a famous TV reporter in town, while the remaining ones have to receive failures. Gilbert hatred toward God and religion gets higher every time he recollects the moment when his father died:

Fortunately or unfortunately, the Bible reading that particular week included a small reference to how suicide is a sure ticket to hell. Momma stood up and led us all down the center aisle. So we stopped going to church. Sunday mornings became our genuinely happy time. (145)

In an equal level, Gilbert's hatred and allergy toward God and religious symbols might also be influenced by the humiliation he received from Mrs. Brainer. Gilbert might see them (God/religious symbols and Mrs. Brainer/teacher) as powerful figures who have authorities in setting rules for people and punishing them for not obeying the rules. God will send those who ignore him to hell. On the other hand, as the "representation" of the Powerful God on earth, a teacher like Mrs. Brainer has the authority to punish his or her students who breaks the

rules. What Mrs. Brainer did to Gilbert when he peed during class can be said as another form of the punishing “hell”. This is the reason that makes Gilbert hate such authoritarian things, as what he finds in the society’s preserved norms, rules, and religion. For Gilbert, the norms, rules or religion can only limit a person’s freedom and put them into a weak position.

Having no figure or person to count on, Gilbert puts in his mind that he has to stand on his own feet. He is not really close with his family. His only bestfriend, Tucker, begins to think about his own business. Above all, Gilbert also has no spiritual faith to trust. He has turned into an introvert person who does not like sharing his thoughts and problems with other people. He seldom asks for help even when he faces difficulties. People might see him as an untouchable person. They do not know that behind his tough and strong appearance, Gilbert is eating his heart out. Becoming a strong person outside is one of the impacts of losing a father figure in the family, but actually he hides his fragile heart inside.

This is how Gilbert maintains his self-esteem. Identities and the bright side are important issues in Endora these days (16). People will give more respect to those who have good reputation, as in having much money, high education, valuable experience or popularity. It is enough to hurt Gilbert’s sensitive feeling for seeing himself as a failure. He realizes that he has none of those things to be proud of. Because he did not attend college, he does not have any bachelor degree like his high school friends or his sister, Janice. Unlike Larry, Gilbert also makes only little money to support the family. Moreover, he considers himself as an unlikable person. It is very ironic for Gilbert to see the way his sisters (Amy and

Ellen) adores the popular Lance Dodge when he appears on the TV screen, while his existence as their own brother is neglected. This condition gets worse with the affair he has with Mrs. Betty Carver. He can only get sexual pleasure but feels emptiness from this unessential relationship. In the end, Gilbert realizes that Betty Carver only makes use of him as an escapade from her unhappy marriage. Gilbert feels worthless because of all those things.

However, if he shows his real emotion (by sighing or crying), it will make people judge him as a weak and hopeless man. Gilbert does not want to receive the same judgment given to his father. Albert Grape was known as a hopeful and happy man for his entire life, but in reality he ended up committing suicide for not having any courage to face the burdens of life. Therefore, Gilbert does not want to take the same option as what his father did. He decides to live a boring life and endure his burdens. He could just give up on his family or his town, but it will only make him feel as a coward, like his brother, Larry. By staying in Endora and protecting his family, especially Arnie, Gilbert feels that his presence is still needed. He gains respect from he himself in this aspect and this become his major motivation in running his life.

There comes a time when Gilbert cannot endure his burdens. It happens when Arnie does not want to take a bath for several days and keeps his body dirty and smelly, while recognizing that his birthday party will come in just several days. He slaps and hits Arnie until the boy bleeds. Gilbert fully regrets that. Later on, he sees Arnie swimming in Endora town pool in favor of Becky. With a smart

trick, Becky succeeds to “clean” the boy. This scene touches Gilbert’s heart and for the first time after so many years, he lets his tears burst out.

Becky’s presence also brings some positive effect in Gilbert’s life. Gilbert manages to learn how to see his town, his family and his life with a new brighter perspective. He no longer feels afraid to admit his traumatic memories and finally expresses his real emotion. He tells Becky that he owes her:

“The party is over and it was a success and Momma’s in her room and Arnie is clean and Larry is talking and it’s all better here, all better. It’s over, all the trauma, all the emotions. Tell me it’s over. It’s slowing down here. A new beginning....” (317)

Gilbert’s emotions and desires which have been exploded after being bottled up so far have helped him to start a “new life”, at least in the terms of his new paradigm. He now begins to accept his condition, including his “extraordinary” family, by thinking more positively. Instead of blaming anybody or the condition around him (his family, his experience during childhood, his father’s death, etc.), he lets everything go as it should go.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The previous analysis has shown us that Gilbert Grape has a complex personality. It is normal because a person might have more than one or two types of personality. If seen from his preference, Gilbert is categorized as an *analytical* person. He tends to think about everything around him in a *skeptical* and *critical* way. Meanwhile, Gilbert can also be said as *melancholic* and *phlegmatic*. It obviously shows in his temperament. He is the kind of person who is not cheerful and enthusiastic in life. For him, life is only a matter of luck. Gilbert's tendency as a *legalist* has also caused him to stay in his go-nowhere existence. He does not really realize that his negative perspective in life has prevented him from having a higher quality of life or advancement.

By using *psychoanalysis theory*, Gilbert's character can be explained scientifically. Besides his disappointment toward his family and his frustration for his aimless relationship with Mrs. Betty Carver, the traumatic past events in his childhood have also contributed a great account on his personality building. Gilbert was just seven years old when his teacher, Mrs. Brainer, humiliated him in front the class. At the same time, he had to face the fact of his father's suicide. Those incidents have been delayed until they become visible or manifest later until he reaches the age of twenty-four. Gilbert cannot help remembering the embarrassing moment with Mrs. Brainer since it will remind him of his father's suicide. On the other side, he tries to forget the pain he feels for losing his father

since it will bring him back to the shameful moment in his childhood. To protect his ego from awareness of those undesired memories, Gilbert has unconsciously developed the stages of *self-defense mechanisms*. He tries to appear as a strong man by projecting his own weaknesses into other object, which is his family, especially his obese mother and his retarded brother. Gilbert forsakes his wishes to leave the house and have his own life for the survival of the family.

Gilbert's inner conflicts are heavy enough to "eat" him. Fortunately, Gilbert has learned how to deal with them from Becky, the fifteen-year-old girl who is in fact much more mature than him. By examining his life on a deeper and more honest level as what Janice says to him, Gilbert is finally able to overcome his *neurotic anxiety*, which is signified by his feeling of worthlessness, guilt and his depressed mood (the feeling of sadness and emptiness). Soon after his optimism is lighted up, the world becomes much better in Gilbert's judgment.

Gilbert's complex personality might be the reason why Peter Hedges as the author chooses him as the readers' means in understanding the novel. It is Gilbert, not the other Grapes, who carries the heaviest burden in the family. He has to make greatest struggle as the unofficial caretaker of the family while having many internal conflicts to deal with. Even though the story ends up with a tragedy (symbolized by the death of Bonnie), the readers can grasp an optimistic view that Gilbert's next life will not remain the same. What Gilbert finally does in coping with his inner conflicts may not be something spectacular, yet it can be considered as a great achievement of him concerning all the burdens he has endured so far.

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