



The Anna Papers

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A novel featuring Anna Hand, a character first introduced in *Drunk With Love*, who commits suicide when she discovers she has cancer. Her sister Helen reading her papers as executor is first aghast, then exultant and liberated by her sister's legacy.

The Anna Papers Details

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Author : Ellen Gilchrist

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gaudeo says

I really tried to like this book, but I feel its focus is off. Instead of being a story about Anna, it should be a story of Olivia, or Jessie, or the relationship between them (sisters). As it is, I just don't like Anna herself. I don't feel the narration puts me "on her side," either. She seems to be a take-her-or-leave-her character. Well, I'd just as soon leave her . . . and I did. I read two-thirds of the book, maybe even three-fourths, but I just couldn't turn another page. Unusual for me.

Unfortunately, this is my first Gilchrist book. Maybe I'll try another one down the line, but this one has put a bad taste in my mouth.

Theresa Griffin Kennedy says

I've already read this but would still like another copy. The one I have is paperback and older, same cover but sometimes with a favorite book, I will buy and collect two. I still don't know if this was ever in hard cover, but probably not. Still, a great and unusual book. Loved it. Must now get "Drunk with Love" by Gilchrist.

Rob says

Ellen Gilchrist is a terrific writer.
Her books have always provided me with great pleasure.
"The Anna Papers" is no exception in this instance as well.

The story of Anna Hand is funny and moving.

I usually pass on most of my books of fiction, but not the books of Ms. Gilchrist.
I like to keep her books near by for another read when I want something that will continue to surprise me on a second reading, or in some cases a third or fourth.

This book, "The Anna Papers" will have a place on my shelf as well.

Amy says

This is my favorite book. Well this or Shipping News. It tells the story of novelist Anna Hand, a woman from a crazy Southern family who kills herself rather than fight a horrible cancer diagnosis. This story winds together the lives of her lovers, friends and family members --even an estranged young niece -- through those who gather at her memorial service, as well as through her papers, notes and letters. Gilchrist is a fantastic writer, and although this story is somewhat dated and stuck in the 1980s, there is nothing more timeless or beautiful than Anna and her love for life and friends. If you haven't read Gilchrist's work, you are in for a

treat. Anna, her crazy cousins and even little Olivia are featured in several volumes of short stories as well as in novels.

Priscilla Lotfy says

I got into this book thinking it could be profound and wanted to see how the situation with the long lost child worked out. But I totally lost interest in these self-absorbed people and found it hard to slog through the last quarter of the book. Pretty bad when you really could care less how it all ends. I grew tired of how willing these people were to jump into bed with anyone who was attractive. Although I liked Anna, the rest of it was a waste of time.

Mary Hawley says

The writing is lovely, and Anna is interesting as a contradictory character who alternates avoiding her family with bursts of meddling. But Anna also avoids big issues in her own life--cancer, for example--and it becomes frustrating to see this intelligent, sexy woman dig her own grave. The aftermath for her family has poignant, interesting moments but seems unfocused.

Alarie says

It was a bit creepy to have the main character, Anna, a promiscuous, highly prolific and successful Southern author, commit suicide in the Prelude after reading Gilchrist's intention to do the same if she becomes seriously ill. It was good drama, however, to have the main character exit the book (a second time) half way through so that we see her and the event from her family's viewpoint.

Jody says

When I borrowed this book, I was thinking it was an entirely different author. Not to far into it I realized it wasn't who I thought it was, so I checked my book journal for others by Gilchrist. I found them and didn't seem to have like them! At this point in the reading, I was really liking this one though.

The first half of the book is about a writer, Anna, who moves back home after just not feeling her normal self. She muddles into her siblings lives in good and bad ways, and maintains a slight connection to her own personal life. She is a character... always herself which is not always appreciated by her family. The accept it mostly with '...that's just Anna for you.' She learns and keeps secret a severe breast cancer diagnosis, wraps a few things up and commits suicide.

The second half of the book is mostly about her sister, as co-literary executor dealing with all her papers. In the process she grows to understand her sister better, and, dare I say, partakes of part of her lifestyle! Learning to be a little more giving to herself after many years of 'sacrifice.' All the characters are touched and influenced by the very strong Anna in one way or another, but most for the better.

So, for me, this book is redemption for not enjoying the others (Net of Jewels and Land of Dreamy Dreams) as much! And while the character of Anna had the potential to create a similar reaction as I had to those in the other two books... I could appreciate her a little more without as much judgment!

Courtney says

I really enjoyed the character of Anna Hand, and her love of life. She is so determined to only enjoy life, that she goes to great lengths to turn away from anything negative. She is impulsive, crazy, the product of a wonderfully dysfunctional family, and I love her! This book also introduces Olivia Hand, and leaves you wanting to read more about her.

Kathy P says

What an absolutely perfect novel. My appreciation for Gilchrist's work just keeps growing, the more I read. Ignore the cheesy-looking cover; this one is worth your time.

Susan E says

I adore Ellen Gilchrist's writing. When I saw she has a new novel out (finally! I've been afraid she's unwell...) and that it featured Olivia Hand, I knew I had to go back and re-read all the books with Olivia in them. So it's back to my old friend, *The Anna Papers*. I don't care than Anna is such the product of her dysfunctional family, I still want to be her. I love these terribly flawed, destructive people.

Wendy Greenberg says

Loved the "alive" Anna in the book...didn't feel quite the same about the following sections where Anna was "told" through other characters. Have read these books in completely the wrong order and with decades of time between them but somehow still feel a part of the Hand family and the women of the South. Fabulous characters whose portraits are drawn so convincingly and whose family dynamics are so persuasive that you feel a part of this extended clan.

Laura says

Eh. This novel started out strong--I enjoyed the first half of the novel told from Anna's point of view--but once she dies, the book's lifeline itself seems to die, too. Helen is a boring character, and it made no sense for Gilchrist to just suddenly insert this weird and poorly written attempt at stream-of-consciousness after Anna's section ends.

Secondly, much of the dialogue felt forced and unnatural. It made sense for Anna to talk so much about "fucking" and use such vocabulary, but it felt awkward coming out of the other characters' mouths. Her conversation with Helen as to whether she has "ever sucked a man's dick" was ridiculous and just seemed so strange and out of place. And it felt just plain silly coming out of Helen's mouth.

The best part of the novel was the section dealing with Olivia and Anna's quest to bring her to meet the Hand family. I loved the tension between the cultures and the added pressure of Daniel's gradual acceptance of her. Honestly, this should have been the focus of the novel; it would have added so much more pathos and tragedy to Anna's character.

All in all, I guess it's worth reading. I really enjoyed Gilchrist's first novel,

The Annunciation, but this felt like a trashier, less interesting version--and Anna is basically a boring version of Amanda. As I said earlier, ...eh.

Marissa Morrison says

There was a time when I devoured books by Ellen Gilchrist. These books provide a sense of escape--beautiful, rich characters flit and out of the frame, doing nothing but getting intoxicated, having relationships with each other, and thinking Big Thoughts about all their relationships. Everyone always speaks in short, similarly constructed sentences.

This novel seems such a mess. It starts many years earlier, with the protagonist sleeping with one man and talking on the phone with another. Neither of the two men have any role whatsoever in the rest of the novel. Fast forward to a time when Anna is moving away from one man and taking up with another. A few paragraphs of that and fast forward again to one year in the future. Now we have a few months with Anna, then she gets a bad diagnosis from her doctor and kills herself (no surprise--we've been told many times earlier in the book that this will happen). The two most recent men appear at her wake (but don't meet each other), as do a bunch of other people we haven't heard of before but about whom we're apparently expected to care. Take for instance the older sister Louise, who is said to be very sad but we don't know why. There's a love triangle between two vaguely defined (yet intriguing) characters and one young man about whom almost nothing is known. By this time I was so detached I started to skim just to finally finish the damn book. One of the secondary characters now becomes the narrator, reads through Anna's journals and realizes she didn't know her at all (my feelings exactly!). Then--thinking some private thoughts to herself about some old grudge with her husband--starts an affair with another character who had made the briefest of appearances earlier in the novel.

Glad this one's over.

Glen says

I really like Ellen Gilchrist for her humane sense of humor and her interesting, sexy characters, especially women, and Anna Hand is no exception. Not as quirky as some of the women in her short stories, Anna is nevertheless remarkable and memorable as the writer everyone loves but no one can hold. The relationship between her and her brother Daniel is especially well-drawn, as is the complexity of the relationship between him, his daughter Jessie, and his daughter by an earlier and short-lived marriage whom he meets for the first time thanks to Anna's meddlesome brokering, Olivia. You find out early on that Anna's end is tragic, but her joie de vivre more than compensates and left this reader grateful to have made her acquaintance.
