



The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis

Max Shulman

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Not exactly a household word, Max Shulman is nonetheless one of the great stealth writers in American pop culture. He cowrote The Tender Trap, which became a big-screen vehicle for Frank Sinatra, and his hilarious, Elvis-intensive satire Rally 'Round the Flag, Boys! also made it to Hollywood, pairing the young Paul Newman with the equally young Joanne Woodward. Shulman's best-known creation, however, is probably Dobie Gillis--that smooth-talking schlemiel of a college student, always on the make for female companionship. And in this case, the synergistic success of the book--which generated both a limp movie musical and a much-beloved television series--does Shulman a real disservice. Why? The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis is much funnier than either of its live-action spin-offs, for one thing. With Dobie himself narrating, the plots shake off at least a grain of their sitcom stiffness. More to the point, though, is Shulman's mastery of wise-guy prose: the goofy, comical elevation of Dobie's voice suggests a kind of broad-brush S. J. Perelman, and if Shulman is a tad less clever than that comedic monster, he's also superior at inducing the world-class belly laugh. Certainly The Many Loves of Dobie Gillis does the trick nicely, and the period illustrations are an irresistible bonus, suitable for framing.



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