

Fiction

AN OCEAN IN IOWA Peter Hedges
(Hyperion, \$22.95) Hedges' wonderfully idiosyncratic first novel, *What's Eating Gilbert Grape*, was overshadowed by the fine film version. This second book confirms his talent—and his penchant for oddly named characters. Scotty Ocean announces that “seven is going to be

my year,” and we see it unfold while peering over his shoulder: a mildly bohemian mother who escapes into alcohol and then escapes for real, a father grasping at a forced bonhomie with his children, school, neighborhood bullies, the building of a backyard pool, and two nosy sisters. That list may sound conventional, but Hedges captures Scotty and his world with such funny, un-

affected prose that his story seems new and special. **A** —*Michael Giltz*