

## **The Miles to Recovery: An analysis of Elizabeth Gilbert's memoir, *Eat Pray Love***

Have you ever thought about dropping everything in your life and traveling the world? Author and journalist Elizabeth Gilbert answered this question; leaving her life behind in Manhattan and setting off on a yearlong trip. The memoir *Eat Pray Love* was published following Gilbert's one year trip around the world exploring beautiful countries such as Italy, India and Indonesia. Gilbert ventured on her quest through these countries hoping to find balance and stability in her life. Her trip was funded as a business trip, as Gilbert had an idea in mind, although *Eat Pray Love* was the unexpected outcome. This 2006 memoir has sold an astonishing 10 million copies worldwide. This year of travel displayed Gilbert's self-transformation as she aimed to find her authentic self, following a chaotic divorce. Gilbert's year abroad allowed her to regain access to her authentic self and self-transform into the woman she used to love.

The title of the memoir exhibits a section of each of Gilbert's trip. In Italy she ate, in India she prayed and in Bali she loved. She was on a pursuit to find solace and balance in her life, which is seen during the conclusion of the memoir. She explains to the readers, "I wanted to explore the art of pleasure in Italy, the art of devotion in India and, in Indonesia, the art of balancing the two" (Gilbert 32). Since her recent marriage ended in a messy divorce, Gilbert has been afraid to love; afraid to be loved, but especially afraid to love. Her travels around the world concluded in her finding balance and solace in her life when she finally learns how to love again. The memoir is divided into the three main sections: "Eat," "Pray" and "Love". Within each of these sections are 36 smaller sections. The number 36 is very significant to the memoir as Gilbert is 36 years old during her time writing, this exemplifies that her memoir is specifically about her development as a person as she even uses her own age as a significant piece during her times as

an author of this memoir. Her writing uses a sense of ethos and pathos to connect the reader to her strong emotional feelings at the time. Gilbert's mental state and stability is described early on in the memoir, therefore allowing the reader to become sympathetic along with being able to make connections to their life. Gilbert's choice of words and phrases persuade the reader into her internal feelings, allowing them to connect with her and her emotions.

The first section of her memoir, "Italy" leaves the reader hungry and eager for more. When Gilbert arrives in Rome she indulges in copious amount of pizza, pasta and extravagant desserts. As she eats her way through Italy, she embeds every aspect of their culture. Exposing herself to the public allows her to dig further into the beautiful nation and language that Italy displays. Gilbert begins to learn Italian from her instructor and new friend, Giovanni, she teaches him more English than he would ever have known. A few weeks into her stay in Italy, she decides it is time to stop taking her antidepressant medication. "It had just seemed crazy to be taking antidepressants in Italy. How could I be depressed here?" (Gilbert 48), she explained. At first this seems troublesome for Gilbert, but she had everything in the world she could ever want at her disposal in this country that she needed some time to become her authentic self without medication. Italy was the first step towards recovery and finding an authentic-self for Gilbert.

Growing up, Gilbert was not raised in a very religious family. Much later in life, during her mid-thirties, things began to shift. As her life and marriage with Michael Cooper began tumble downhill, she reached out to God for help, and initiated in spiritual and religious practices. Prior to her divorce, while she was unhappy and still living with her husband in New York City, Gilbert would call up to God for advice. "You sometimes must reach out of its jurisdiction for help, appealing to a higher authority in order to find your comfort" (Gilbert 56). Once her residency in India began, her spirituality rose exponentially. God was a large attribute

towards Gilbert's self-transformation. As the second section of the memoir begins, "Pray," Gilbert finds herself in a small Ashram near the city of Mumbai in India. An Ashram is spiritual place committed towards religious activities which is usually separated from the general public and society. During her four months spent at the Aashram, Gilbert has been practicing yoga and ways to find and speak to God. She has transformed herself and her spirituality during her stay in India.

Gilbert's peak of self-transformation happens after a while of spending some time with a Brazil native, Bali living man, Felipe. After countless days spent together the two began to grow a sincere bond. The moment Felipe told Gilbert he loved her, she began to back away and resent his love. She did not do this because she did not love him back, it was because she was afraid to love again. "How do the survivors of terminated relationships ever endure the pain of unfinished business" (Gilbert 200). This concluded in Gilbert running away and telling him that her trip is over and she will be heading back to New York. Although, moments later once Gilbert had time to herself to ponder on what Felipe had said, she admitted to herself that she did love him back. Felipe taught Gilbert what it is like to run away from your fears and transform yourself for the better both internally and towards those she cares deeply about. Although it is unknown whether it was Italy, India or Bali that allowed Gilbert to come to terms with herself and her self-love, the conclusion of the memoir shows that even though travel may have been the cure to Gilbert's uneasiness – maybe everything she ever wanted and needed was right beside her but she just did not know how to discover it.

The idea of authenticity and one's notion of self-creation has been discussed in depth by, American moral philosopher, David DeGrazia. His work, "Prozac, Enhancement, and Self-Creation," explores the concept that authenticity and individuality are a process created through

self-creation. Gilbert displays characteristics of self-transformation and self-creation as a form of authenticity explained by DeGrazia through her journey around the world. His works explores the concepts of self-creation and authenticity through his subject Mariana. Mariana, a very unhappy person seeking change in her life, believes that taking the drug Prozac will be more successful and inexpensive route towards happiness. Mariana and Gilbert are parallel subjects in this idea, both in a very dark place of depression. Although Mariana's goal is to be prescribed Prozac in order to recover, and Gilbert's is to wean off antidepressants such as Prozac. Gilbert's notion of stopping to consume her prescribed medication was when she realized her happiness was surrounding her in Italy. It is believed that, "People who are engaged in self-creation seek to change themselves" (DeGrazia 37). Before her trip, Gilbert escaped her life as a journalist and an author in the rigorous city of Manhattan with the hopes to find herself and to find happiness. New York City has a very fast paced work environment and daily lifestyle. In a field like journalism, Gilbert is working day in and day out trying to compete for the best story to be published. This displays DeGrazia's idea of hyper-competitiveness and designer personalities. DeGrazia believes that people's ambitions are inauthentic because of hyper-competitiveness and the suspect of these social norms. Gilbert is not able to find herself in New York City, therefore falling into a deep hole of depression. Gilbert's adventure across the world displays behavior of self-enhancement, as she delves into DeGrazia's method. "For, again, what is identity in the relevant sense all about? It is about one's self-conception, what a person considers most important to who she is, her self- told inner story" (DeGrazia 37). Gilbert's self-transformation and aim to alter herself to find authenticity is mirrored through ideas expressed in DeGrazia's work.

Throughout the memoir, *Eat Pray Love*, author, Elizabeth Gilbert takes the reader on an adventure through her self-transformation. Her transformation was shaped by leaving the United States of America on a journey to find balance and stability in her life, with the goal of returning to her authentic self. Gilbert learned what it was like to fall in love again, and leave everything she once had behind for a stronger and more successful life, both internally and externally. It took Gilbert a year's worth of travel to realize that everything she needed in order to balance her life was waiting for her, she just had to take the opportunity to love herself again.