Students interested in Elizabeth Gilbert's thoughts on the writing process can find several video interviews with the author at bigthink.com/user/elizabethgilbert.

QUESTIONS ON MEANING

1. The essay does not include an explicit thesis statement, but the dominant impression is of a breathless jog, even ecstasy, in the experience of chaos and sensory overload.

2. Gilbert means to entertain her readers, no doubt, but also, it seems, to persuade them to seek out pleasure for themselves. She appeals to readers directly in paragraph 5, enjoining them to not "even worry about it. Just go," to "get there fairly early," and when "they try to take a bite off your apple and the gummy crust folds, and the hot cheese runs away in the landscape... just deal with it." The suggestion is that like tospoil in a landscape... just deal with it." The suggestion is that like tospoil in a landscape... just deal with it."

3. As Gilbert sees it, "[traveling-to-a-place] energy and living-in-a-place energy are two fundamentally different energies" (par. 2). Travelers seek out new places "just to check them out" (1) and focus on novel experiences; temporary residents necessarily get caught up in the mundane aspects of real life, such as paying utility bills. Gilbert places herself in both categories: She's temporarily living in Rome but travels to Naples to reignite a traveler's sense of newness and wonder.

4. Metaphors is the philosophical study of reality and being. The pizza is so good, and so beyond the realm of anything she's ever experienced, that it causes Soffie to question everything she ever knew—about pizza, about eating, about her place in the world, and perhaps even the meaning of life. The same is true for Gilbert.

5. The pizza represents everything that is good and special about Naples and serves as the embodiment of the "pure pleasure" (par. 11) Gilbert sought as a tourist to Italy.

QUESTIONS ON WRITING STRATEGY

1. Gilbert didn't go to Naples for the pizza, but it turned out to be the defining moment of her trip. The jump back to Rome serves as a transition between the two halves of Gilbert's essay: her description of Naples and her description of the pizza.

2. The irony is that, although Gilbert thinks she is abusing her body, she feels better than she has in a very long time. She seems to conclude that sometimes the healthiest thing a person can do is abandon all concerns about health and focus, instead, on pleasure.

3. Readers of a book titled Eur. Prov. Love would presumably expect and appreciate ecstatic descriptions of food that holds a special significance for the writer. Gilbert assumes that her readers are interested in traveling to new places and that, if they haven't done so themselves, they've at least read about exotic destinations (notions, for instance, her casual reference to "Tibetan prayer flags" in par. 4). She also assumes that they have some general idea of what Italy is like. She is careful to describe the specific experience of Naples with vivid and unforgettable images, such as a "crooked old woman seated at her window, peering suspiciously down at the activity below" (4) and pizza makers whose "sleeves are rolled up over their sweaty forearms, their faces red with exertion, one eye squinted against the heat of the fire and a cigarette dangling from the lips" (10).

4. The first two paragraphs explain that Gilbert met somebody who was traveling for pleasure, and the encounter made her jealous, sparking a desire for adventure. The introduction establishes Gilbert's reasons for traveling to Naples and puts her experience in a broader context.

QUESTIONS ON LANGUAGE

1. Similes: "undershirts and brassieres flapping in the wind like Tibetan prayer flags" (par. 4); "The accent in Naples is like a friendly muffler on the ear." "It's like walking through a city of short-order cooks..." (5); "showering for access like they're trying to get space on a lifeboat," "much the same way one shimmering movie star..."; "hot cheese runs away like tospoil in a landscape..." (9); "looking for all the world like the boilermen in the belly of a great ship..." (10). Metaphors: "longing to travel while you are already traveling is...a kind of greedy madness," "a Joneses to hit the road" (2); "an amant inside a rabbit warren..."; "A tripped-out, dangerous and cheerful nuthouse" (4); "I almost felt I was being inducted into a secret society" (7); "contact high of glamour" (9). Image: "There is not a street in Naples in which some tough little kid in shorts and mismatched socks is not screaming up from the sidewalk..."; "Nor is there a building in this town that doesn't have at least one crooked old woman seated at her window..." (4)."I feared one of them might get shot" (6). We also particularly enjoy the writer's personification of her pizza in paragraph 8, where she imagines that it loves her back. Every one of Gilbert's figures of speech is fresh, imaginative, and highly evocative.

2. Gilbert's diction is profoundly colloquial. Just a few examples include "gave me such a Joneses to hit the road" (par. 2); "tripped-out" (4); "so insanely psyched," "right up in your face," "flipped me the finger" (5); "don't even worry about it," "wannabe pizza hndle," "deal with it" (9); "can barely cope" (10). Piled one on top of the next, her colloquialisms build a tone that is breathless and exuberant. She is utterly thrilled by Naples and can't contain her excitement, which she wants to share with her readers. Her choice of language therefore strikes us as not only appropriate but also effective.

3. The effect is one of intensity and immediacy. Students may have trouble finding a reason for the inconsistent use of quotation marks, but it seems that the girl's thoughts are directed at Gilbert, whereas the woman's (in italics) are more general, meant for everyone, and possibly muttered to herself.

4. Students may have difficulty finding nan (sometimes spelled nann) in a general dictionary, but recipes abound online. The slightly sweet and aromatic leavened flat bread, similar to pita bread but fluffer and more flavorful, is common in south Asian cuisine.