Description

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

QUESTIONS ON MEANING

1. The essay does not include an explicit thesis statement, but the dominant impression is of a breathless joy, 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 9, enjoining them to not “even worry about it, just go,” to “get there fairly early,” and when “[y]ou try to take a bite off your slice and the gummy crust folds, and the hot cheese runs away like topsoil in a landslide . . . just deal with it.” The suggestion is that readers should undertake the same journey Gilbert describes.
3. As Gilbert sees it, “[t]raveling-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. *Metaphysics* 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 Sofie 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 visitor 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 *Eat, Pray, 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 (notice, 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, yet 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