

Review Of *Eat, Pray, Love: One Woman's Search For Everything Across Italy, India And Indonesia* by Elizabeth Gilbert. Penguin Group. New York, NY. 2006.

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Elizabeth Gilbert reveals her innermost thoughts in *Eat, Pray, Love*, sharing personal experiences of her pursuit for pleasure, devotion, and balance. In an intimate, first person account, Gilbert invites other women to follow her journey. Gilbert's re-telling of her epic search for divinity and peace with herself and the romantic relationships in her life gives a voice to modern women living in a time of expectations of the past. While *Eat, Pray, Love* begins with divorce, unsuitable rebound-love and crushing depression, Gilbert's story progresses into one of forgiveness, self-acceptance and an honest, soulful search for the Divine. A self-proclaimed Christian with a passion for yoga, and the desire to learn Italian, Elizabeth Gilbert candidly speaks to readers of any faith seeking to be whole with the self and the Divine.

In Gilbert's "Introduction or How This Book Works or The 109th Bead," the author explains the numerically symbolic construction of her book: 108 tales for the 108 beads on the "japa malas," beads worn by Hindus and Buddhists for focus in prayer and meditation (p. 1). The 108 tales are evenly divided into 36 sections, contained in three books, broken down by the three different countries in which each tale takes place. Weaving the holy number of three into the very foundation of her book, Gilbert utilizes the power of trinity, present in many faiths, to create an intentional space for her quest to become one with the Divine. Written in her 36th year, Gilbert's account of a 30-something modern American woman looking to forge her own path gives a voice to women of any age who follow their dreams, even if it means disrupting the order in their lives. The *Introduction* is also the 109th bead (for thanks) on a "japa malas," her time to thank those who have helped her on her journey.

"Book One or Italy or 'Say It Like You Eat It' or 36 Tales About the Pursuit of Pleasure" is the story of Gilbert's quest for the enjoyment of life, rediscovered. After spending years in depression resulting from her divorce, Gilbert travels to Italy to learn Italian, a language she finds so beautiful that she must make it a part of her own. In Italy, Gilbert begins to unfold her history, showing glimpses of her former. Recounting her tumultuous existence in New York, and her desperate conversations on the bathroom floor with "God", Gilbert sets the stage for her drastically different and decadent time in Italy. Infusing her story with the rich history of her host country, and spending four months exploring the language, culture, and cuisine of Italy, Gilbert emerges

from the first third of her journey well rested, well fed, and ready to meet herself and the Divine in India.

"Book Two, India, or 'Congratulations to Meet You' or 36 Tales About the Pursuit of Devotion" brings Gilbert to an ashram in India where she spends four months practicing yoga and learning the art of meditation. The author shares her encounter with the overwhelming voices of self-doubt, blame, and guilt that distract her from her meditation, explaining how she learned to channel those voices with love, and eventually make peace. Gilbert passionately and comically relives her most intense moments in the ashram, once again revealing her most personal struggles and conversations with God. In "Book Two," Gilbert introduces the reader to the most powerful force during her time in India; her new friend "Richard from Texas," a man of much wisdom with an origin of adversity. It is here, at the ashram in India, that Elizabeth Gilbert gives religion and spirituality the nurturing love and respect that both deserve.

"Book Three or Indonesia or 'Even in My Underpants, I Feel Different' or 36 Tales About the Pursuit of Balance" brings Gilbert to Bali, seeking balance within herself and with the world around her. With Gilbert's notions of Bali being, "A perfect Eden with no history of violence or bloodshed ever" (p. 236), the author discovers that what seems to be perfection may simply be an effort to find balance with reality. In a country of almost indescribable beauty and a history of political violence, Gilbert examines how her preconceived notions often contrast with actuality. It is in Indonesia, the last third of her journey, that Gilbert is "free", stating "I don't mind anything these days. I can't imagine or remember discontent" (p. 235). In "Book Three," Gilbert finds relaxation and love in a land where many come to leave their world behind and bask in the physical beauty of an island that financially survives on the exploitation of wealthy expatriates.

Eat, Pray, Love, written with Elizabeth Gilbert's unabashed honesty, brings readers close to the author, providing a friend and confidant in which to identify. In a time when women are still figuring out how to balance their dreams with expected roles in society, Gilbert gives a voice to women who want to travel and live off the beaten path. Gilbert's story speaks primarily to women and, while autobiographical, reads like a novel. Her ability to spend one year traveling internationally with ample funds is an opportunity that few have. Nonetheless, the reader lives vicariously through Gilbert's eloquently written, soul-baring accounts of her year long quest for "everything." In the end, Gilbert finds love, and, in the vein of a romance novel, we are captivated by her amazing story.