

A LOOK AT ELIZABETH GILBERT'S REPERTOIRE IN EAT, PRAY, LOVE: AN ANALYSIS OF WOLFGANG ISER'S AESTHETIC RESPONSE

Susie Kusumayanthi^{1*}, Suminto A. Sayuti², Maman Suryaman³, Margana⁴, Agus
Widyantoro⁵

Yogyakarta State University, Indonesia

Email: susiekusumanthi.2022@student.uny.ac.id¹, suminto_sayuti@uny.ac.id²,
maman_suryaman@uny.ac.id³, margana@uny.ac.id⁴, agus_widyantoro@uny.ac.id⁵

First Received: August 2023

Final Proof Received: September 2023

ABSTRACT

This study aims to explore Elizabeth Gilbert's repertoire on the island of Bali in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* and to reveal what Elizabeth Gilbert wants to convey through the novel. *Eat, Pray, Love* tells the story of Gilbert's journey in seeking inner peace in three countries, namely Italy, India, and Indonesia where each country gives her a different aspect of life. This research focuses on Elizabeth Gilbert's repertoire on her trip to the island of Bali in terms of Wolfgang Iser's Aesthetic Response theory. The data source of this research is a novel by Elizabeth Gilbert which was published in 2006 by Viking Penguin, USA. This research was conducted by tracing the reality of terrorism that had occurred in America in 2001 and in Bali in 2002 as the background. The data collection technique was carried out by reading notes accompanied by a careful and thorough recording of the entire novel related to Elizabeth Gilbert's repertoire. This research technique is carried out through the following steps: reading, identification, classification, interpretation, and inference. The results of this study are not directed at static and absolute meanings, but meanings that continue to move according to the expectations of each reader. Thus, science will continue to roll as the process of reading each at different times and socio-cultural realities.

Keywords: *Aesthetic response theory, Eat Pray Love, Elizabeth Gilbert, Terrorism, Wolfgang Iser*

INTRODUCTION

The development of modern literature has shown the existence of literary works that are closely related to sociological, historical, and cultural facts and reality. It is undeniable that the creation of literary works is an imitation of the existing reality. It is revealed that literary works might be the result of the creation and creativity of an author that comes from the experience of human life directly by using interesting language as a medium (Wellek & Warren, 1990). Elizabeth Gilbert, for example, is a woman who has experienced depression and despair when facing a divorce that made her not recognize herself. Of course, it is undeniable that Gilbert's life experiences might influence the works produced. The reality that is encountered in her life journey is a manifestation of the "storehouse of knowledge" owned by Gilbert as an author. Therefore, it is not surprising that the works she produces contain journeys in soul-searching and self-discovery and tend to raise issues in the aspects of life that surround them, in particular spiritual aspects and balance in life.

Elizabeth Gilbert is a prolific writer. This can be seen from the many works produced; one of which is the novel *Eat, Pray, Love*. Over time, the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* continues to be interesting and popular until it has sold more than 12 million copies and has been

translated into more than 30 languages. The most spectacular is the adaptation of this novel to the big screen with the same title in 2010 starring Julia Roberts as Elizabeth Gilbert (Arumsari, 2012).

Eat, Pray, Love tells about a journey of soul-searching and self-discovery that is packaged in an interesting story complete with experiences about various cultures from three different countries (Gilbert, 2006). This story begins with Liz's anxiety about her life. This journey is in search of inner peace which takes place in three countries, and each country provides her with a different aspect of life: (1) in Italy, Liz finds worldly pleasures by tasting delicious food, learning the beautiful Italian language, and enjoying the warmth of kind people. , (2) in India, Liz obtained a spiritual life and devotion to God by learning to pray and meditate (yoga) with the help of a spiritual teacher, and (3) in Indonesia, precisely on the island of Bali, Liz rebuilt herself by learning the art of balance between pleasure worldly and divine transcendence assisted by an elderly spiritual Ketut Liyer; and unexpectedly, Liz finds her love for a Brazilian man named Felipe.

The atmosphere of Bali, in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love*, is displayed not only beautiful to the eye, comfortable, and exotic, but also has a greener, calmer, and spiritual impression of tourism. But if you read more deeply, Elizabeth Gilbert in *Eat, Pray, Love* also reveals other things that happened as a result of the 911 attacks in America in 2001 and the consequences of the Bali Bombings in 2002, especially the consequences on Balinese society and tourism industry in Bali.

Referring to the paragraph above, it appears that the novel *Eat, Pray, Love*, which is narrated in the location of the island of Bali, is Elizabeth Gilbert's repertoire of knowledge, one of which is probably about the history of terrorism. The repository of knowledge (repertoire) is a term proposed by Iser in his book entitled *The Art of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1987). This study intends to discuss the socio-economic and historical manifestations in *Eat, Pray, Love* as a repertoire.

To the best of the author's observation, research on *Eat, Pray, Love* with the concept of repertoire put forward by Iser regarding Elizabeth Gilbert's novel which is focused on the history of terrorism might have never been done. However, some of the writings related to the novel can be stated here. The scientific articles that are used as references for this writing are the latest data, namely in the last five years.

An article written by Lukow Natalia Kristin, Elizabeth Z. Oroh, Deli Sabudu (2019) about "Women Image in Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat Pray and Love*". This article analyzes the depiction of women in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* with a mimetic approach. The results of this study indicate that Elizabeth Gilbert as a character in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* has the characteristics of a modern woman who is independent, educated, strong, and caring (Kristin et al., 2019). Next, the article written by Sarah, M and Thiruppathi, T (2018) about "Spiritual Quest in Elizabeth Gilbert's *Eat, Pray, Love*". This article analyzes Gilbert's spiritual journey in India with a meaning-making approach. The results of this study indicate that happiness is a consequence of one's efforts that must be fought hard even by traveling the world (Sarah & Thiruppathi, 2018). Another article was written by Jayantini, Umbas, and Suwastini (2021) about "The Narrative of Balance in Bali in the Novel *Eat Pray Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert". The purpose of this study is to identify the narrative structure of the balance that is built in the story. The textual study method is combined with diction analysis from Keraf and the principle of balance of life based on the perspective of Tri Hita Karana which views human happiness as created from the balance of human relations with God, between humans, and nature. This study found that the narrative of balance in Bali in the novel *Eat Pray Love* is (1) the balance of the relationship with God, (2) the balance of human relations, and (3) the balance of the relationship with nature. The

three balances are narrated predominantly in two ways. First, diction is in the form of general words, special words that have the power of suggestion, and abstract words to show concepts that live in the mind. Second, expository and suggestive narratives show a picture of the search for balance in Bali within the framework of Tri Hita Karana so that life becomes harmonious (Jayantini et al., 2021).

As stated above, this paper is based on the aesthetics of Iser's reception. Iser focuses his discussion on the general reader's response to literary texts and the text's relationship with readers in individual contexts. One of the main concepts of Iser's theory is repertoire. Repertoire is simply called as a "storehouse of knowledge" (Mashur, 2007). Repertoire is in the scope of reception aesthetics which is possibly related to the way the reader gives meaning to the work he reads. In this context, Iser's reception aesthetic might emphasize more on the effect or impression of the reader in concretizing literary texts (Setyami, 2012). Furthermore, the concretization of the text is supported by the availability of the reader's memory and the reader's expectations of the text he reads. According to Iser, repertoire consists of all elements that can be recognized in a text (Setyami, 2012). These elements could be in the form of references to previous works, or social, cultural, and historical norms that appear in the text. In addition, repertoire can also be in the form of personal experiences or thoughts on reading references or previous works that are the basis for inspiration/background and foreground for works created later (Setyami, 2021). Both of these settings might give an effect or impression to the reader (who is termed as *Wirkung* by Iser) when understanding and concretizing literary texts. By using the theoretical framework above, this research is intended to reveal Elizabeth Gilbert's repertoire in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* and to reveal what Elizabeth Gilbert wants to convey through the novel.

METHOD

The data source in this research is the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, published by Viking Penguin, USA in 2006 with a thickness of 352 pages with a total of 108 chapters. The data collection technique was carried out by reading notes, namely reading accompanied by careful and thorough recording of the entire novel. Considering that a text will only give meaning when it is read (Iser, 1987), it is necessary to read the text in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert to reveal the repertoire and its meaning.

This research is a qualitative descriptive study. Qualitative research is defined as research that does not carry out calculations, and qualitative methodology is defined as a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or spoken words (Bodgan & Taylor, 2012; Meleong, 1990)

The data analysis method of this research is based on reception aesthetics which was initiated by Iser. This method is carried out with the following techniques, first, reading the text of the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* and marking and noting the parts that are considered as repertoire. Second, classifying social and historical elements which are considered as repertoire. Third, identify and interpret the embodiment of social and historical elements as repertoire in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love*.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The discussion will focus on the study of the aesthetic response to the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* by Elizabeth Gilbert, especially with regard to the repertoire. The relevant theory as an analytical tool is Wolfgang Iser's theory of aesthetic response which is exposed in the book *The Act of Reading: a Theory of Aesthetic Response* (1987).

Before going further into the discussion, the key narrative of the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* needs to be reviewed first in order to get an overview of the story. The novel *Eat, Pray, Love* narrates the life of Elizabeth Gilbert herself. In her early 30s, Liz divorced. The divorce makes her heart unsettled and in confusion so Liz wants to find inner peace. Although her friends and family were worried, Liz still decided to leave her home in New York City for a whole year to 'find herself'. For that Liz went for a year and spent her days in Italy, India, and Indonesia. During that one year, Liz challenged herself to become a stronger and more enlightened woman.

In Italy, Liz learned the art of worldly pleasures, learned to speak a beautiful language which is Italian, and gained the happiest twenty-three pounds of her life enjoying a variety of Italian food. In India, Liz learned the art of devotion, and with the help of a meditation teacher and the help of a very wise friend from Texas, Liz embarked on four months of uninterrupted spiritual exploration. In Indonesia, on the island of Bali, Liz became a student of an old shaman to learn the art of balancing worldly pleasures and divine transcendence. The quote below narrates the balance Liz has been able to achieve while in Bali:

I can feel my own peace, and I love the swing of my days between easeful devotional practices and the pleasures of beautiful landscape, dear friends and good food. I've been praying a lot lately, comfortably and frequently...

...Most of my prayers are expressions of sheer gratitude for the fullness of my contentment.

While traveling in three countries, Liz was busy looking for inner peace due to the depression she felt because of the divorce. Apparently in the end, Liz was able to find that calm within herself by submitting herself to the Divine will, and the quote above proves that Liz has found peace by achieving a balance between human relationships with God, and between humans, and nature. The relationship with God in the quotation above is strong which can be interpreted that true happiness is not about what you have but getting closer to God which makes her even more grateful for what has happened to her.

Eat, Pray, Love reflects Elizabeth Gilbert's "storehouse of knowledge" about her life. The statement is based on the text that Gilbert appears in the novel. It can be seen from the background described by Gilbert in her novel. In this novel, in addition to the narrative of depression due to divorce and self-discovery, Gilbert also narrates about the condition of the people on the island of Bali who have experienced terrorist attacks. Then this background is supported by the foreground, namely the presence of narrations from the characters Ketut Liyer and Yudhi in the novel. The two settings give effect or impression to the reader in understanding and concretizing the *Eat, Pray, Love* text when Gilbert was in Bali.

For Gilbert herself, the island of Bali had an important meaning in her life, especially when she was looking for an old spiritual named Ketut Liyer at a time when Gilbert wanted to rebuild herself by learning the art of balancing worldly pleasures and divine transcendence. Ketut Liyer was a Balian, a traditional Balinese shaman. Foreign tourists refer to him as a "medicine man" or a "traditional healer", a term for people who practice traditional medicine. Ketut Liyer was known as a friendly person who was good at predicting the personality of his patients by observing the line patterns on the palms, observing glances, smiles, and so on. Ketut Liyer was also good at doing traditional medicine with plants. No one can say for sure how old Ketut Liyer was. There was a possibility that he had reached 100 years. This is because the ancient Balinese did not usually record the date of birth in the Christian year.

Regarding the Bali bombing; the 2002 Bali bombings were a series of three bombings that occurred on the night of October 12, 2002. The first two explosions occurred at Paddy's Pub and Sari Club on Legian street, Kuta, Bali, while the last explosion occurred near the American Consulate General's office. This terrorist act claimed 202 lives from 21 countries, as many as 418 buildings were damaged and the estimated loss reached 5 billion rupiahs (National Museum Australia, 2002). The impact borne by the local government of Bali and the community is relatively large. This can be seen from the number of foreign tourist arrivals that had continued to decline since the Bali bombings in 2002 until early 2004 (Faisal, 2005). The Bali bombing is considered the worst terrorism event in Indonesian history. The background of this incident also came from the riots that occurred in Poso and Ambon (Braithwaite, 2010). In addition, the Bali Bombing was carried out to defend the people in the history of the Afghan war against the oppression by the United States. The background of the Bali Bombing incident is also because the terrorists think that Bali is a location that is not in accordance with the teachings of their religion. The Bali bombings had an impact on the socio-economic conditions of the Balinese people; from a social point of view, citizens are suspicious of people they do not know, and from an economic point of view, the income of the government and citizens has decreased. As a result, economic growth in Bali was slow until at least two years after the terrorist incident occurred (APEC Secretariat, 2017).

Regarding the consequences of the Bali bombings, Gilbert in her novel *Eat, Pray, Love* narrates the disturbed socio-economic conditions of the Balinese people where the income of the residents has decreased as a direct result of the Bali Bombings, as narrated on page 235 of the novel, as follows:

It's really no trouble being here. You can change your money at the airport, find a taxi with a nice driver who will suggest to you a lovely hotel- none of this is hard to arrange. And since the tourism industry collapsed in the wake of the terrorist bombing here two years ago (which happened a few weeks after I'd left Bali the first time), it's even easier to get around now, everyone is desperate to help you, desperate for work.

The socio-economic conditions raised by Gilbert in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* above illustrates the consequences of the Bali bombings where the income of the residents decreased and the residents would do whatever it takes for their sustainability and economic growth. This fact had relevance to the reality at that time. The events of terrorism not only left sadness, anger, depression, and trauma for the victims, but acts of terrorism also tore apart the Bali tourism industry. Bali's life seems to be suspended and the Balinese economy has also slumped. Being in a condition at its lowest point, forced the Balinese to adopt a number of strategies to survive where there were some people who changed job status, employment opportunities and increased working hours (Liputan 6, 2012). The Balinese then tried to get back up and tried to convince foreign tourists that Bali was safe and comfortable to visit.

This downturn in the socio-economic field is also experienced by Ketut Liyer as Gilbert tries to express in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* as in the following quotations, consecutively, from pages 242, 249, and 336 of the novel:

"Let your conscience be your guide. If you have any Western friend come to Bali, send them to me for palm reading---I am very empty now in my bank since the bomb. I am an autodidact. I am very happy to see you, Liss!"

“Come back tomorrow. I am very happy to see you, Liss. Let your conscience be your guide. If you have Western friends come to visit Bali, bring them to me for palm reading. I am very empty in my bank since the bomb.”

“Let your conscience be your guide. If you have Western friends come to visit Bali, bring them to me for palm-reading. I am very empty in my bank since the bomb.”

Gilbert in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* seems to be trying to voice that the acts of terrorism, apart from harming, destroying, and contradicting human dignity, also injure the welfare of citizens by directly tearing up the tourism industry in Bali.

Furthermore, Elizabeth Gilbert's "warehouse of knowledge" which appears in the text she narrates in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* is the foreground with the presentation of the character named Yudhi. Yudhi's presence in the novel gives the reader an effect or impression in understanding and concretizing the *Eat, Pray, Love* text when Gilbert was in Bali.

Yudhi comes from the Javanese tribe; at a very young age, he worked as a crew member sailing to New York City. There, he met and married an American woman. Everything was going well until the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, which destroyed The Twin Towers and shook the feeling of the whole world. As a result of the threat of terrorist attacks, a law was born that implements very strict immigration regulations aimed at Islamic countries including Indonesia. Although Yudhi had nothing to do with terrorism, he was arrested and held in a detention center in New Jersey for weeks. Yudhi was finally returned to Indonesia with a 'stamp' as a suspected terrorist and could not return to America and was separated from his wife. Yudhi then ventured to Bali and it was here that he met Elizabeth Gilbert. The confinement that happened to Yudhi is narrated on page 268 of the novel as follows:

After a period of detention, the US government sent my Christian friend Yudhi—now an Islamic terrorist suspect, apparently—back to Indonesia. This was last year. I don't know if he's ever going to be allowed anywhere near America again. He and his wife are still trying to figure out what to do with their lives now; their dream hadn't called for living out their lives in Indonesia.”

In the quotation above, it is narrated that the biggest impact for Yudhi is because of his identity as a person from Southeast Asia, and more specifically from Indonesia; a country known to have the largest Muslim population in the world. So even though Yudhi is not Muslim and has married an American woman, he is still detained and it is difficult to return and to be accepted into America again.

Elizabeth Gilbert's repository of knowledge in *Eat, Pray, Love* corresponds to the reality regarding the confinement of foreigners as a result of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 in the United States where after the terrorist attacks of September 11, the United States immigration policy is directly connected with policies against terrorism such as War on Terrorism and the enactment of laws that give the United States Department of Justice the power to detain, deport foreigners or exclude foreigners suspected of having links to attacks or links to terrorism. In the 11 months following the attacks, 762 foreigners were detained in connection with an FBI terrorism investigation for various immigration

offenses, including extending their visas and entering the country illegally (Gilde, 2005). It is important to note that many of these detainees were arbitrarily arrested and detained.

Gilbert in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* seems to be trying to voice that the acts of terrorism, apart from harming, destroying, and contradicting human dignity, also directly take away freedom and happiness.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis conducted, the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* as a literary work has a relationship with reality. This relationship can be explained by the concept of repertoire through the background and foreground that appear in the text *Eat, Pray, Love*. The effect or *wirkung* is captured by readers and researchers through reading the work.

The results showed that in the novel *Eat, Pray, Love*, Elizabeth Gilbert uses socio-economic norms and historical norms as repertoire. The socio-economic norms caught were in the form of the downturn of the Balinese people because the tourism industry was torn apart due to the Bali bombing attack. Meanwhile, the historical norm used as a repertoire is the history of terrorism in 2001 in the September 9th attacks in America and the 2002 bomb attacks in Bali.

The novel *Eat, Pray, Love* is a reflection captured by Elizabeth Gilbert on the downturn of Balinese society due to the shattering of the tourism industry there. The downturn seems to be oriented towards the dignity of the Balinese people who were injured by terrorists in the attacks known as the Bali Bombing attacks in 2002. The reflection that Gilbert captured also comes from the sadness and helplessness of foreigners in America. This helplessness is oriented towards the sense of freedom and happiness that terrorists took away from the 911 attacks in 2001. This conclusion is based on tracking the equivalence of the repertoire of the novel *Eat, Pray, Love* with the socio-economic norms and historical norms used by Elizabeth Gilbert. Gilbert seems to emphasize that terrorism is the reason for the birth of depression and sadness. Gilbert may want to put forward that presenting the narrations of Ketut Liyer and Yudhi in *Eat, Pray, Love*, is very important to voice peace and love. Differences in religion, ideology, or race are not reasons to justify terrorism. Every human being should be respected for their dignity and worth.

Through all of these elements, Gilbert concretizes the extratextual meaning into textual meaning with the addition of processed aesthetic narrations. Gilbert implicitly offers the hope of peace and love, and her criticism of the fact of terrorism that occurred in America in 2001 and in Bali in 2002 through the background to present the foreground she wants to address. Gilbert uses her repertoire (knowledge warehouse) to respond to the reality seen, researched, and felt in the 911 terrorism incident in America and the Bali bombing incident.

The results of this study are not directed at static and absolute meanings, but meanings that continue to move according to the expectations of each reader. Thus, science will continue to roll as the process of reading each at different times and socio-cultural realities, it is not impossible that other meanings will be found by different readers later.

REFERENCES

- APEC Secretariat. (2017). *Strengthening Tourism Business Resilience against the Impact of Terrorist Attack*.
- Arumsari, S. (2012). *Freedom to Choose in Ryan Murphy's Movie Eat Pray Love*. Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta.
- Bodgan, & Taylor. (2012). *Prosedur Penelitian*. Rineka Cipta.

- Braithwaite, J. (2010). *Anomie and Violence*. ANU E PRESS.
- Faisal, E. (2005). *Dampak aksi teroris terhadap pariwisata Indonesia dalam perspektif ketahanan nasional : Studi kasus : Bom Bali*. Universitas Indonesia.
- Gilbert, E. (2006). *Eat, Pray, Love*. Viking Penguin, USA.
- Gilde. (2005). The Legal Framework. Who is Entitled to Move? In *Controlling Frontiers* (pp. 14–48). Ashgate.
- Jayantini, Umbas, & Suwastini. (2021). The Narrative of Balance in Bali in the Novel Eat Pray Love by Elizabeth Gilbert. *Kembara*, 7(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.22219/kembara.v7i2.17178>
- Kristin, Oroh, & Sabudu. (2019). Women Image in Elizabeth Gilbert's Eat Pray and Love. *JELLT*, 4(2). <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.36412/jellt.v4i2.2390>
- Liputan 6. (2012). *No Title*. <https://www.liputan6.com/news/read/443816/efek-bola-salju-bom-bali>
- Mashur. (2007). *Kasidah Burdah Al-Bushiry dan Popularitasnya dalam berbagai Tradisi: Suntingan Teks, Terjemahan, dan Telaah Resepsi*. Universitas Gadjah Mada.
- Meleong, L. J. (1990). *Metodologi Penelitian Kualitatif*. CV Remadja Karya, Bandung.
- National Museum Australia. (2002). *Defining moments: Bali Bombings*. <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/bali-bombings>
- Sarah, M., & Thirupathi, L. (2018). Spiritual Quest in Elizabeth Gilbert's Eat Pray Love. *IJSR International Journal of Scientific Research*, 7(9).
- Setyami. (2012). *Repertoire dalam Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk karya Ahmad Tohari: Kajian Estetik Wolfgang Iser*. Universitas Gadjah Mada.
- Setyami. (2021). Inisiasi Ronggeng dalam Novel Ronggeng Dukuh Paruk. *Sarasvati*, 3.
- Wellek, R., & Warren, A. (1990). *Theory of Literature*. England : Penguin Books.