**Elizabeth Gilbert: Big Magic**

[Name of Writer]

[Name of Institution]

Self-help books, especially those endorsed by Oprah Winfrey, are generally eaten up by the general public. However, few have gotten the acclaim that Elizabeth Gilbert’s *Eat, Pray, Love* received. With one memoir safely residing atop the privilege of being declared a cultural phenomenon that millions not only read but vowed to live by; the newest Gilbert memoir could have been wrong from multiple perspectives but would still be capable of arousing discourse. I feel that it successfully did exactly that.

Although *Big Magic* (Gilbert, 2015) claims to reveal the secret behind living the creative and personally fulfilling life Gilbert has lived, there are some flaws so intellectually glaring that it is impossible to overlook those. Having only read the first chapter, I had discovered that Gilbert meant to grab the mystery around the ‘creative process’ by its horns and tackle it to the ground. Creativity was not supposed to be restricted to artistic ventures but henceforth covered any act that brought its doer joy. Learning to skate or cook or dance or write were all creative tasks. Authenticity mattered more than real, un-plagiarized work. According to her the secret to living a creative life therefore lay simply in discovering what you ‘were meant to be’ and then blatantly being that. Even though all of it can be summarized in a single corny sentence on a coffee mug, it is still genuine and meaningful advice. The real problems begin when the readers are told the context of this advice and are shown the philosophical connotations that Gilbert has extracted from it.

The first truly problematic issue of the book arises from the depths of everything that makes it a memoir. There are contradictions in Gilbert’s recollections of her life and how she lived it. She claims to have miraculously shaken her own anxiety and depression; she disregards her own creative process; she makes lofty claims about her confidence in her work and contradicts it later. The list goes on. The not-so-subtle grandeur that Gilbert has tried to emulate in this book by claiming to have discarded her fears by realizing they were boring is starkly juxtaposed against her apparent powerlessness in front of her creative ‘ideas’ which, in fact, controlled her. This brings me to the second notoriously controversial take that I noticed in this book. Elizabeth Gilbert has made an absurd claim that ideas are actually conscious and willfully leave a person who is not ready or inviting enough. It only gets weirder when she claims that the idea for a book about Amazon flew from her to a friend when she kissed her cheek at a party. In its whole essence, this concept is nothing but a watered (and battered) down version of the ancient belief that art is a superior force while artists are simply vessels.

However, there are positives that can be plucked from the book. First of all, there is great and comprehensive advice in the form of the claim that fancy schools which teach art and creativity are useless and amount to nothing. She also claims that when art is commercialized and needs to earn money, its creative value dies. Every artist can relate and agree with that. The book says that the inspiration for creativity is random and mostly independent of the external environment the artist might create for an easy flow. Although debatable, a larger chunk of this advice is also reasonable. Therefore, the crux of the book and the general air it builds around creativity and how to go about it is quite bold, defiant and rational. If a reader can overlook the few technical or intellectual fallacies, it can be a great help in boosting creativity.

# References

Gilbert, E. (2015). *Big magic: Creative living beyond fear.* New York: Riverhead Books.