

DİLEK ÖZTÜRK¹
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The Convergence of Psychoanalysis and Drama : Spalding Gray's *Monster in a Box*

The initial aim of this study is to draw a rough map of psychoanalytic theory and explore the relationship between psychoanalysis and drama in accordance with Spalding Gray's monologue *Monster In A Box*. My accounting for this paper will be that there appears a close bond between psychoanalysis and drama. In order to back up this view the first section of the paper will introduce the theoretical principles and main concepts of psychoanalytic theory: the models of the psyche, the concept of repression, the role of sexual instincts, the role of the mirror stage – and their place in psychoanalysis. In the second part of the paper Spalding Gray's monologue *Monster In A Box* together with his novel *Impossible Vacation* will be discussed in the light of psychoanalytic theory – especially in Lacanian concepts.

I – Psychoanalytic Theory In Key Concepts

Sigmund Freud “gives a genetic explanation of of the evolutionary development of the human mind as a ‘physical apparatus’ ” (Wright 9). He studies the mind by looking at it from three different points of view: the ‘dynamic’, the ‘economic’, and the ‘topographical.’ All these divisions imply that Freud attempts to derive the mind from the body.

The ‘dynamic’ model of Freud introduces the two parts of the mind which are the *conscious* and the *unconscious*. The conscious perceives and records external reality, whereas the unconscious receives and stores the hidden desires, ambitions, fears and irrational

* Master's Degree Student in the Department of English Literature, Bogazici University, ISTANBUL/TURKEY

thoughts, memories that need to be revealed in and through the conscious. This revelation occurs through various ways such as dreams, art, literature, plays, jokes and slips of tongue - known as the Freudian slip. Later Freud adds another dimension to the division of psyche - the *preconscious*. It's the store house of memories that the conscious part of the mind allows to be brought to consciousness. Taken as a whole the 'dynamic' point of view focuses on the interplay of these forces within the mind to take control of our actions.

Freud's second model is the 'economic' model. With the 'economic' model comes two different aspects that describe the human psyche – the *pleasure principle* and the *reality principle*. According to Freud's theory, pleasure principle craves for his own desires and satisfaction, ignores the morals and rules of society. However the reality principle realizes the need for regulations and rules and doesn't seek for its own pleasures. Under the economic model these two poles are at war in which the body has to learn to postpone pleasure and accept a degree of trouble to comply with the needs of society.

The third point of view is the 'topographical' model in which Freud makes a three-fold division of the psyche – the *id* is the term applied to the instinctual drives that arises from the needs of the body; the *ego* is an agency which regulates and opposes the drives; and the *superego* can be described as parental and social influences upon the drives. This tripartite model of the psyche is often called the 'structural' model. With the appearance of these agencies the schema of dynamic conflict within the mind becomes clearer.

Putting it in a nutshell we shall discuss Freud's understanding of sexuality. This understanding of sexuality is not just limited to the process of reproduction. It includes the function of obtaining pleasure from zones of the body. But the concept of what's sexual is greatly extended and complicated. Freud is in a way showing that sexuality is not only a matter of a biological drive but it involves the production of fantasies under pressure of external circumstances. We should also look at the workings of the *Oedipus Complex* and the

Electra Complex in order to better understand Freud's theory of sexual identity. Freud sees the child's relationship with its parents as critical for the development of its proper identity. The difficulties begin with the child's dependence on the mother, and his erotic attachment to her. But the child realizes that he has a rival for his mother's affection - the father. From then on, he develops a kind of fear which is the fear of 'castration' by the father. The father is then experienced as source of all authority, all direction of desire and thus as capable of castrating the boy. Therefore the boy represses his sexual desires abandons his love for the mother and moves towards identification with the father, hoping that he can one day possess a woman and occupy such a position of power. Whereas the situation is not so straightforward in the case of the girl. The girl thinks that the absence of a penis is a failure in terms of the mother. Under the influence of this disappointment she turns away in hostility from her mother and they become rivals for the father's love. The process here is a bit uncertain, since the girl can't overcome her jealousy of the mother and attain identification with her.

For Freud, this Oedipus complex is the core of desire, repression and sexual identity. The struggle to overcome this complex does never come to an end and it's never quite resolved. It's the cause of neurotic illness of the psychoanalytic process, where the patient is offered a chance to free himself from repressing thoughts. At this point Freud talks about the concepts of *transference* and *countertransference*. Transference is the displacement of feelings from one idea to another; it's considered to be many layered; so feelings, thoughts, and attitudes linked to more than one person and to people of different genders can show themselves in current relationships. Countertransference can be described as a response to transference that can complicate communications in various situations. In both cases the process is unconscious. According to Freud a person's early formative experiences are critical, and relationships experienced in childhood are mirrored with significant others throughout life. Earlier events manifest themselves in all human encounters; in repeated

difficulties in relationships, dreams, ambivalence, and slips of tongue. Therefore the ideas of transference and countertransference offer a means to unravel the complexities of human life.

What is at stake in Freud's theory is that he distinguishes between two kinds of transference. In the first instance transference was for Freud the displacement of feelings from one idea to another. This becomes relevant in the encounter between the patient and the analyst. The interpretation of the patient's repressed wishes, demands, words and actions and his resistance thus becomes the key technique of psychoanalysis. The second kind of transference develops in the course of treatment. Freud names it the 'transference neurosis'. The closer the analyst approaches to the repressed complex the more the patient's behaviour becomes pure repetition and very much akin to fantasy. The patient is then on the verge of 'repetition compulsion'- the uncontrolled return of the repressed feelings. (This issue will later be discussed in the other chapter in accordance with Spalding Gray's art and his psychological state).

Let us now look at Freud's account of the genesis and nature of dreams, since they have a significant place in Freud's metapsychology. As the unconscious expresses and conveys the repressed feelings in and through different ways mainly in the form of dreams, nightmares, jokes or irrational thoughts. Freud defines the interpretation of dreams as the "royal road" to a knowledge of unconscious activities of the mind. Dreams for Freud are symbolic fulfillments of unconscious wishes, since in the condition of sleep there is no sign of any impulse or restraint, the unconscious softens, trashes all its memories, distorts its meanings so that our dreams become symbolic texts which need to be 'deciphered' (Eagleton 136).

Freud suggested that what dreams reveal may contradict all our knowledge of reality therefore we have our distinction between the *manifest* content of a dream and the *latent* dream-thoughts. The manifest content can be thought of as what a person would remember

as soon as they wake - what they would consciously describe to someone else when recalling the dream. Freud suggested that the manifest content had no meaning because it is a disguised representation of the true thought underlying the dream. Whereas the latent content holds the true meaning of the dream - the forbidden thoughts and the unconscious desires. His theory of 'dream-work' describes the transformation of the 'latent' content of the dream into the 'manifest' dream stories what the dreamer remembers. Thus the operations of the dream-work and its distortions take four forms. The first of these is *condensation*. It can be described as a kind of combination of two or more latent thoughts to make up one manifest dream image or situation. The process of *displacement* is the second distortion. In this process the emotion or desire is transferred onto a meaningless or unrelated object in the manifest dream, instead of the intended person or object. Condensation and displacement can produce both visual and auditory images for abstract thoughts, thus contribute to the representation in dreams. These representations may have fixed conventional meanings or they may contain variety of symbols which are completely strange to the actual dreamer. They may also correspond to the some social and cultural variations. This 'symbolism' in dreams is the third form of the dream-work, in which complex or vague concepts are converted into a dream image. For this, the mind may use the image of a similar sounding word instead or use a similar looking less intrusive object.

According to Freud, dream symbols are for the most part sexual in meaning thus many dreams have sexual correlations. He suggested that objects such as tree-trunks, ties, all weapons, sticks, balloons, rockets and other long objects were all symbols for the male organ - an erection. While boxes, cases, chests, cupboards, ovens, suitcases and other hollow objects represented the female genitalia. A room usually or the whole house, a door or the whole dream landscape signified a woman. The simple act of walking up a staircase, steps or ladders could also signify a sexual act. As a result, Freud's assumption that "all human

behavior is sexually driven” creates controversy and many critics tend to see every image as sexual - a cup, a vase, a cave is a female symbol and any image whose length exceeds its diameter such as a tower, a sword, a pen, a knife become a phallic symbol. This reminds us of Terry Eagleton’s views on the nature of the literary texts. Terry Eagleton thinks that “all literary texts contain certain sub-texts and to some extent they may be spoken as the unconscious of the work itself” (155). He in a way claims that what the text doesn’t say and how it doesn’t say it may be as important as what it conveys. In other words what seems absent or ambivalent and hidden, may provide a certain insight into the work itself and its meaning. Therefore psychoanalytic criticism can do more than hunt for phallic symbols, it can tell us something about how literary texts are actually formed.

Carl Gustav Jung is another important name in psychoanalytic criticism. Like Freud, Jung also described the mind as the core of conflicting elements, beginning in childhood and following a path through the developmental stages of the individual. In 1913, Jung coined the term ‘analytical psychology’ to distinguish his new psychological science from Freud’s theory of psychoanalytic process. He opposed Freud’s idea of *libido* as the energy underlying the transformation of the sexual instincts. What’s at stake in Jung’s theory is that his system is generally described as being both ‘process and ultimate goal’ (Wright 59) What is meant by this is that Freud’s libidinal stages are often categorized as a series of transformations, departing from the baby’s emergence from a collective unconscious and becoming a separate self. Whereas Jung sees the self in the flow of its life experience, struggling on the one hand with archetypal images of selfhood, and on the other hand with the needs and the demands of the society. Jung’s understanding of psyche is interesting. He thinks that people from all over the world respond to certain myths or stories in the same way, because racial memories of humanity lie deep in our collective unconsciousness. These memories appear in the form

of archetypes: such as birth, death, rebirth or motherhood and they express themselves in our stories, dreams, religions and fantasies. These archetypes occurring in literature stir certain emotions in the reader and awaken images stored in the collective unconscious.

It can be useful to mention Jung's ideas on art which relevantly differs from Freud. Jung wants to save the work of art from the work of the analyst, namely from the equation of art and neurosis. He decentralizes the author within the text and replaces it by a sort of mouthpiece which stands for a universal language of symbolism.

It is often noted that with the advent of archetypal criticism, Freudian analysis lost importance for a while. But then in 1960's French psychoanalyst, neo-Freudian critic Jacques Lacan revived the theory. Lacan suggested that the 'unconscious was structured like language,' thereby giving a key role to semiotics and dissolving the usual boundaries between the rational and irrational.

Lacan like Freud developed his tripartite model for the human psyche: *The Imaginary*, *the Symbolic* and *the Real* stages. Lacan begins with the infant in a shapeless state with no boundaries, as a jumble which he calls 'l'hommelette' - home-lette, 'little man'; omelette. In order to explain this he turns to Freud's study of *narcissim* and to its key metaphor- 'mirror.' In this mirror stage the infant makes an illusory identification with its reflection in a mirror, and he's delighted by the qualities of his image. Lacan explains that this identification of the child is of crucial importance since it reveals a kind of libidinal dynamism just like the case in Freud's *narcissim*. Lacan suggests that this moment is the child's initial awareness of itself as a biological being. In simple terms, this is the part of the psychoanalytic problem of identification. During this process of identification the self is perceived as fragmented but not yet as an entity. The shapeless image now gains a sense of wholeness, an ideal completeness. Thus the 'mirror stage' becomes an instrument in the formation of the *I*, during this stage the

child gains some control over the space around him. Lacan calls this as pre-oedipal, pre-linguistic period- the realm of the Imaginary. Mark Fortier states that “like the simple reflection in the mirror, the imaginary is not the whole person: it is simplistic and rejects troubling complexities” (Fortier 91). The idea of fragmentation in Spalding Gray’s self and in *Monster In A Box* will be discussed later elaborately.

Lacan also touches upon the idea of ‘Desire of the Mother.’ This term is coined by Lacan himself which refers to both the child’s desiring his mother and the mother having the child as his object of desire. During this Imaginary stage the child wants to become all that would satisfy the mother’s lack. Then the child enters into the order of language which is called as the ‘Symbolic’ order. Once the child enters into this stage, he learns that he has to postpone his desire for the mother and the self; desire must be directed towards an object. Though seen apart, the Imaginary and the Symbolic stages are linked and they often fall into conflict. This tension can’t be resolved in favor of either party. Beyond these realms there is the Real, which Lacan describes as the ‘unknown’ - in the mathematical sense and in the psychoanalytic sense, where a patient is refusing to acknowledge some aspect of reality. The Real does not even constitute what we would normally think of as ‘reality’: According to Lacan, it is an encounter with the Real which causes us to take shelter in the Symbolic, and which can give us up to complex psychoses.

As Lacan reread Freud, like him he attempts to reach the unconscious via dream-work. He tries to uncover the relationship between latent and manifest dream content. He’s also concerned with individual speech patterns with breaks, gaps and irregularities in these patterns.

From Classical Psychoanalysis we move on to the Radical Psychoanalysis. The late French theorists Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari are also concerned with psychoanalysis but rather

in a radical way. In their distinguished works *Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A thousand Plateaus*, they mainly dealt with the “rethinking and liberation of the human entity” (Fortier, 98). They paved a new way in the history of psychoanalysis decentralizing the oedipal structure in the field. They thought that human beings are oppressed in society between oedipal issues and capitalism which limit their freedom. Therefore psychoanalysis attempts to make human beings well adjusted to the society. According to Mark Fortier “Deleuze and Guattari point toward a future in which de-oedipalized, deterritorialized and deregulated humans are free to become something other, free to travel a thousand plateaus” (98). They focus on the need to escape limitation and constraints that appear in the form of hierarchies. They also take up Artaud’s notion of a “body without organs”, this refers to a body which is not subjected to social boundaries. One example of Deleuze’s approach to oedipal structures can be seen in his work *One less Manifesto* in which he focuses on the theatre of the Italian playwright Carmelo Bene. Bene in a way goes beyond the limits of an oedipal theatre and disrupts the traditional theatrical elements. Therefore Deleuze takes into consideration his work. He thinks that the language of theatre is mainly an oedipalized society in which there appears a kind of hierarchy and a master-slave relationship between the author, director and the characters. Though Deleuze emphasizes upon the idea that theatre is oedipal, he is aware of the impossibility of escaping the oedipal structures.

Let us now move on to another theorist Slavoj Žižek. Žižek focuses on social and political formations rather than on the individual. As a thinker, Žižek’s ideas are very much akin to Derrida. He thinks that deconstruction comprehends the boundaries imposed on human beings by the notion of the real itself. These limits also define the human conditions. Human beings always want to impose order over chaos therefore they construct ideological systems and fantasize things.

It will be valuable to put in a nutshell the relationship between psychoanalysis and feminism which has been an ambiguous one. Many feminist thinkers have dealt with the doctrines of Freud and Lacan and used their principles to criticize their theories. These feminist thinkers centered around the same problem. They thought that the traditional psychoanalysis supported the oppression of women.

For instance the Bulgarian-French theorist Julia Kristeva is an important figure in feminist theory. Her book *Revolution in Poetic Language* can be considered as an important contribution to psychoanalytic theory. Julia Kristeva suggests the idea of “semiotic” which is quite different from Saussure’s thought. She talks about a kind of pre-linguistic stage in human beings, this order is associated with the mother’s body. Then the subject enters into the symbolic order which is associated with law, order, reason, the father and the masculine; then he turns away from the body to the rhythm of desire. The semiotic state does never disappear, it becomes a “subject in process” and is always renewed in the endless struggle of semiotic and symbolic, feminine and masculine forces.

Another important figure in psychoanalytic theory is the French feminist playwright and theorist Helene Cixous, who has written many plays related to the theory. *Portrait of Dora* and *The Name of Oedipus* are two of the most prominent works of her. *Portrait of Dora* is an adaptation of Freud’s case study Dora. In this study, Freud “attempts to impose a patriarchal agenda of desire and identity on Dora” (Fortier 106). But Dora resists to his intentions, breaks off her appointments and leaves the analysis incomplete. Cixous’ version breaks off with Freud’s narration, and in this new telling of the story Dora is presented both as a “victim and a heroine” (Fortier 106). Like Kristeva, Cixous mainly deals with the mother and the world of the mother. She employs Freud’s own material to criticize the oppressive psychological role that Freud imposes on women.

Before moving to the second part it will be useful to give a brief account of the relationship between drama and psychoanalysis. As it is known theatre inescapably involves human beings. In drama we have the author, the reader and the characters, similarly in theatre, the director, the actors and the audiences participate in the event. This inevitable relationship between the human beings and theatre provides material for psychoanalytic theory. Since psychoanalytic theory attempts to understand the human mind - how human beings become the way they are and why they act in the ways they do. It's important that we mention Freud's and Lacan's studies in dramatic criticism. Freud's best known contribution to dramatic criticism is his analysis of the Oedipus complex in his *Interpretation of Dreams*. Freud rereads Sophocles' play *Oedipus Rex* and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. For Freud, psychoanalytic study of the play and its characters leads to psychoanalytic study of the author. Therefore before arriving into a conclusion about Hamlet's psychological state, Freud looks at the motives that forced Shakespeare to write the play. Like Freud, Lacan also rereads classical and Shakespearean drama but he focuses on the reflections of the psyche and the unconscious in the dream texts. He doesn't dwell on sexual desires but he follows the way how the unconscious folds and unfolds itself through different ways. Spalding Gray's *Monster In A Box* will be very much exemplary in terms of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

In conclusion we can say that psychoanalysis has dealt with art and literature including drama. In the first approach art is taken as a dream or a manifestation and it's used to psychoanalyze the artist. Secondly, the characters are studied in order to see the motives working behind their psychic mechanism. The third approach is related to the role of psychoanalysis in cultural formations or institutions. In each of these types of analysis, we should read past the manifest content of the author's life, the character's actions, the society's practices to arrive at the hidden latent content which tell the real story.

II – Spalding Gray : “The Talking Man”

Classical psychoanalysis dwells much on the autobiographical facts about the author. Keeping this in mind I will try to give some basic information about Gray’s life story not to break with convention. Born in 1941 Spalding Rockwell Gray was an American actor, playwright, screenwriter, performance artist and monologist. In 1967 while he was on a vacation in Mexico City, his mother committed suicide at the age of 52. This was an important event in Gray’s life which affected him throughout his life. In 1992, he published his first and only novel, *Impossible Vacation*. The novel is based on his own life, his experiences, including his upbringing and his mother’s suicide. Then he wrote a monologue about his experiences in a book entitled *Monster In A Box*. The novel and the monologue go very much hand in hand. Gray tells the interruptions depressions and trials he encountered while writing his novel *Monster In A Box*. In 2001 Gray had a car crash and suffered from severe injuries; after the accident he was shattered both physically and psychologically. He had many attempts of suicide. In 2004 he was declared missing; his body found in the East River which meant that he probably committed suicide.

This chapter will begin with a brief analysis of his autobiographical novel, *Impossible Vacation*, in which Gray looks back at his younger days, with particular attention to the effects of his mother’s suicide on a young man’s fragile psyche and the following events. Gray has dedicated *Impossible Vacation*; “To My Mother, The Creator and Destroyer.” He spent many agonizing months writing and re-writing his novel. In the monologue *Monster In A Box*, he explains the ordeal of creating his “monster.” *Impossible Vacation* reveals that the monster of the novel is his mother, her ashes are kept in an urn and later thrown over

Narragansett Bay. Taking into consideration the recurrent events in his life, the story of his novel seems to stick very close to his life story.

In the novel *Impossible Vacation* we're introduced to Brewster North, and learn of his developing artistic sensibilities both as a performer and storyteller. Brewster both lives his experiences and reflects on them creating art from his own life. While modeling in an art class Brewster experiences the feeling of being an outline and says:

“I made the wonderful discovery in an hour. I found that I could empty out and turn into an outline again. I could disappear without fear because I knew that the whole class was keeping me in that room with their eyes. The more people looked at me, the more I was present and I was also free to come and go from that presence”

(Quoted in Salz 147).

This feeling is much like what Gray experiences on stage while performing his monologues. Gray's developing need for an audience is often explored in his monologue *Monster In A Box*. Having other people's eyes on him calms him down. In *Impossible Vacation* Brewster tells stories about the past and tries to re-live his experiences through humor and storytelling. Similarly Gray has told us the story of the beginning of his aesthetic development, which corresponds with his awakening idea of self. The character reveals us that telling his own life stories to an audience could be his personal salvation.

Coming back to *Monster In A Box*, we can say that Gray's script is a bit unfocused and personal. He talks about his art projects that he's working on while trying to write his novel *Impossible Vacation*. It's a highly personal piece. He reflects on the suicide of his mother and the effort required to write his autobiography because of that important event in his life. Since the monologue revolves around his experiences, the structure rambles from one memory to another. But the stories still catch our attention. There's so much talk of *I* in his piece., We can comment that he is still in the “mirror stage” in Lacanian terms. Maybe it is

this *I* that makes Gray such a popular monologist. When asked about the description of this art Gray replies:

“Well the best definition is what I heard from a ten year old girl who had seen one of my monologues. I asked her what she was doing there and she said: my dad told me I had to come and see the talking man. And it was like a circus act: The Talking Man. I am someone who sits down behind a table and talks about himself“

(Quoted in Salz 154).

Monster In A Box centers around Gray's writer's life of solitude and the result of coping with that isolation. He opens his book by explaining that his play was the result of a Project his agent wanted him to do. In *Monster In A Box* he says: “But I didn't know how I was going to write a novel because I don't know how to make anything up, so I thought I'd write a book instead. So I began working on this book called *Impossible Vacation*” (4). This point is repeated throughout the monologue which indicates that Gray's memory rather than his imagination is the starting point of all his narrating. When Gray finally tries to settle down and write this autobiographical book, he confesses that his monologue is all about the interruption happened to him while he was trying to write the book. Let me now give a brief account of *Monster In A Box*.

In his preface to the monologue Gray explains: “I thought the monologues were making me too extroverted. I wanted to pull back into my more introverted self and go back in and explore the private self, the shadow self” (6). On one hand he has this lust for living but on the other hand he has to suffer all these interruptions that come his way. He realizes the need to be connected to other human beings and be in touch with the real world. He leaves the peaceful, comfortable writing colony to accept a Project in Los Angeles. He tries to overcome this sense of isolation and loneliness by accepting a series of invitations to Hollywood businessman. He goes to Los Angeles to do the first Project called “L.A: The Other.” He has to find interesting people to be interviewed on stage about living in Los

Angeles. These people are all unique and strange in their own ways. At the end of his monologue he includes a section entitled, "Others Others." The chapter gives us an insight into Gray's state - to his boundaries between his life and art. He states that all these life stories are potential materials for drama:

"Not everyone I interviewed on the Mark Taper Forum stage in Los Angeles was as weird as I make them out to be in the monologue. To some extent I understand now how I was taking an easy shot at their idiosyncrasies. But, on the other hand, their odd stories make for good drama."

(72).

There's another Project that Gray takes over. He goes to Nicaragua to listen to the stories of the mothers, the heroes and the martyrs of the recent revolution. He tries to have access to other's thoughts to find himself. The third Project he deals with is a film festival in Russia. All these projects help him to gain a feeling of empathy and understanding which is good for his depressing state of mind. He attends the festival on the occasion that his film *Swimming To Cambodia* will be shown there. But just before the program they realize that the Russian translation is missing. This creates frustration among the audiences and Gary finds himself in a question-answer session. He begins to talk and tell a story. The story achieves to bridge the gap between the Russian audiences and himself, and he constructs an emphatic relationship. Though psychotherapy couldn't heal his anxieties and fears about life, these encountering with other people at least works well and begins to heal Gray. He returns quite content from Russia, he seems to have cured all his anxieties through his experiences there. Finally he feels that he has the energy to complete the novel. But there's one last interruption, he has the chance to play the Stage Manager in a play called *Our Town*. This experience of the living theatre brings Spalding fully back to life. He minimizes his phobias, trying to strike a kind of balance. He even begins to accept his mother's death and tries to get on with life.

While reading the play we understand that Gray is exposed to all these interruptions, distractions and temptations without any real sense of control. Most of the time he's without a plan, he just does what suits him at the moment; then he continues with his novel. He doesn't attempt to organize his life but let the things fall. However he then suspects whether he has made the right choices.

For Gray, freedom is always attractive but it has its downsides too. Therefore Gray seems always on the verge of a nervous breakdown. He admits that he is "by nature extremely narcissistic and reflective" (Demastes 78). He chooses to create art out of his past for many reasons. He tries to remember his own experiences and create art out of all these memories and experiences. He in a way tries to escape from his narcissistic side by articulating all these problems and telling all these stories. Even he speaks of himself and the content of his plays. He therefore suggests an ambiguity and confusion about his subject.

Gray has a fragmented self; it's constantly questioning itself but providing no answers. This situation indicates the close link between psychoanalysis and storytelling. Peter Brooks asserts that "the kind of explanation in which psychoanalysis deals is inherently narrative, claiming an enhanced understanding of the present – and even a change in it – through histories of the past that have been blocked from consciousness" (47-48). What saves Gray from a devastating nervous breakdown is the idea that he must tell his life stories.

Let us now deal with the psychoanalytic content of the two stories. Both *Impossible Vacation* and *Monster In A Box* share the adventures achieved in the pursuit of artistic expression and the obsession with the unattainable goal- life as art. Gray in fact realizes the vanity of this goal; but his neurotic and amusing voice never cease. He finds solace in reuniting with his audiences. He most of the time works without a script but he goes through a kind of process while creating his monologues. First he remembers an experience, writes

down its outline, shapes and edits it and finally turns it gradually into a work of art. Much of this work is done with and in front of an audience. Therefore performance is really important for Gray. He can't feel whole without the audience; every night he dives into his traumatic memories. His performance acts as a therapy for him and he finds comfort in the "talking cure" which refers to both psychoanalysis and his performing monologues. He tries to grasp a certain "perfect moment" and achieve oneness with the audience. Since Gray assumes that there's reciprocity between life and stage, audience perception and validation of the real. In one of his interviews he explains this unity like this:

"I even found I was more intensely alive during the performance than I was when I wasn't performingEverything disappeared in the room and the audience and I were one ...That was the most exciting point for me because it allowed a confrontation with the audience's eyes that I would never forget"
(Quoted in Brewer 239)

He produces stories from his experiences and wants his stories to be witnessed. Since he feels that his experiences turn to real only when they're witnessed by the audience. These stories, the monologues are not prewritten but they're developed with audiences. We can assume that since he has always this fear of loneliness, he needs the audience. As his sentence illustrates: "It's an illness, writing. It steals your body from you. There's no audience. You're alone" (7).

Although *Monster In a Box* has a comic tone, there's also this theme of the actor's separation from audience and the neurosis that follows from this estrangement. Since Gray through the first half of the monologue suffers without the audience that relieves and defines him. He needs to release his pressure through performance. He says:

"By now I'm hysterical and desperate. I come back to the house saying, "Renee, they told me I should find a therapist. I don't know what to do. They're probably right, but I have to interview the L.A. people. I don't have time to find a good therapist. I'd have to look at so many-and the Monster and- K.O.'s outside- and the mothers of the heroes and the martyrs want me to go tell president Reagan-!"
(39).

Gray is very much aware of his dependence on performance and knows how to be cured. Dealing with the “L.A. Other,” he gets a chance to move outside of his own neuroses and question others in front of an audience. He escapes from his introverted fragmentation by all these projects. He says:

“I didn’t find a therapist but I completed the project. And I went and collapsed in front of my dressing room mirror and I thought, now that’s interesting. I haven’t thought about death or dying for two weeks. Isn’t it therapeutic to surround yourself with people weirder than yourself! ”
(43).

Gay Brewer claims that “it’s not merely monologic performance that restores Gray but also the ameliorative effect of dialogue, interaction, and discovery in a theatrical space” (248).

Gray finally decides to take medical help and finds his therapist, a Freudian psychoanalyst, he recognizes the rightness of “the old slow talking cure” (43) for his suffering. At one point Gray tells us his experience in the Freudian analyst.

“Now we’re working very fast and very hard, and I’m telling him the story of my book. Certainly I know what the cure in psychoanalysis is supposed to be, so I’m looking both ways. I don’t want it to take me by surprise because I’m not really sure that I want the cure. I know the cure is supposed to be the transformation of hysterical misery into common unhappiness. And God knows I have a lot of hysterical misery, but I’m not sure I want to let go of it”
(46).

Though Gray undergoes therapy sessions he doesn’t want to rely on such suppositions for the cure. He doesn’t think that this letting go of misery will work out. Even the doctor doesn’t give much importance to Gray’s symptoms- sweating feet, barking or dry mouth. He believes that there must be another reason lying behind all these. One day he asks: “your problems have to do with what’s in that book. Would you tell me the story of that?” (45). We can think that, with this statement Gray has already demonstrated to us, writing the novel is a failed therapeutic exercise. Since he prefers performance to writing and wants to share his experiences. He needs to tell it to an audience, at least to his psychoanalyst. Finally Gray’s

method works; as Dr. Peter announces that Gray is “much better” and “able to relate to me now in a nonperformance mode” (46).

Gray takes on many new projects and continues to deliver his monologues showing much dependence on language. We can assume that Gray has this compulsion for recognition and validation of his presence. In the film project he once says: “I’ve been recognized- thank God I’ve been recognized- for being on the David Letterman show. They are over there asking me , ‘What is David Letterman really like?’ ” (59). Throughout *Monster In A Box*, we see Gray’s need to be witnessed, to be physically seen. He wants to attain a kind of reality through these performances. However ironically enough he’s caught up in the middle of his past stories.

Therefore it’s clear that Gray’s audience acts as a ‘mirror.’ He sees his self-reflection in the eyes of the audience. This is very much like the child’s identification with the mother in the mirror in Lacan’s psychoanalysis. The baby at first doesn’t have a sense of wholeness but once he sees himself in the mirror, he gets himself completed. He acquires a sense of union between the inner and the external space. He also gains a illusory union with the mother. In the “Mirror Stage” the child has a sense of having been born premature. This sense of fragmentation always hunts him. This stage reflects man’s desire to get over this fragmentation and insufficiency towards anticipation. This situation is very close to Spalding Gray’s case.

According to what Lacan thinks; human beings will always strive to attain this unity. They will always want to become someone and attain a kind of autonomous self. Lacan asserts that this constant striving will go on because there is a “lack” in the subject that can never be filled in by any object of desire. Man will always continue to look for the absent object of desire only to realize that lack always remains as a lack. Lacan associates this lack as ‘the lack of the mother.’ This is very much applicable to Spalding Gray; since he often

mentions a couple of troubles rooted in his childhood and upbringing and his mother's suicide is inevitably the most important element in this problematic situation. He often talks about his being a rather depressed man. He says:

“I can't tell the difference between the world's sadness and my own...I have an enormous sense of humor in a public space and I can make people laugh. I help people laugh. But I don't laugh a lot myself. I'm rather morbid and have a somewhat depressive nature...I'm a Gemini. Split”

(Quoted in Brewer 240).

On one hand he has his humor and makes the audience laugh, but on the other hand he has this gloomy side. There's this dichotomy in his psyche. This is very much like the gap between the conscious and the unconscious, which starts with the child's entry into language. We can relate this to Spalding Gray's dependence on talking and narrating, his giving voice to his own unconscious. Fluidity of speech is also of utmost importance to Gray. He uses it effectively on the stage while delivering his monologues. In fact he knows how to strike a balance between the audience movement, his movement and the rhythms of the language. In one of his interviews Gray tells that the constructed nature of language allows him a sort of “private ‘self’ within which to daydream and have his associations” (Schechner 161). This brings our mind the very famous statement of Lacan which says “The unconscious is structured like language.” Gray's neurotic voice and his sentences compose his stories. Then he feels himself a “being” in front of the audience. The issue of language, however, is problematic. On the one hand, this dialogue suggests communication and a bond between life. On the other hand, it leads back to Gray's primary dilemma. He can't distinguish between the real and the illusory. He can't live in the present but constantly harks back to the past; since this talking head, this neurotic voice can't be silent.

There is one last thing that we can consider in the context of psychoanalysis regarding Gray's monologue. For Gray the importance of performance is great since it creates a certain insight. In *Monster In A Box* he explains the attraction to his novel's protagonist Brewster

North of playing Konstantin, the young writer in Chekov's *The Sea Gull*: "he likes the fact that Konstantin gets to shoot himself in the head at the end of every performance and then come back the following night to play himself again" (11). This repetition acts as a therapy for him, it's this play, this rebirth that attaches him to real life. Gray realizes the therapeutic repetition of performance in his role as the Stage Manager in the Broadway revival of *Our Town*: "And now here I was going to a funeral –Emily's funeral- eight shows a week and this was giving me a sense of closure around the issue of having missed my mother's funeral" (68). Gray has been on stage continuously during the last episode, and he has calmed down and become integrated. The closing of the Wilder play in a way marks the conclusion of Gray's monologue; his monster becomes silent. Gray concludes saying "And as I pull the curtain closed at the end of the play- I 'm not acting- I'm crying" (65). Similarly the protagonist of the novel *Impossible Vacation* decides to "skip the story and take a vacation instead" (71).

All these indicate that Gray has found certain peace on-stage and tried to escape into the "reality of theatre" (Brewer 250). Gray calls this incident a "unifying accident." This scene of graveyard, this accident of the boy and his breaking off the silence - all help Gray to grasp the meaning of life. He in a way returns from the edges of madness to the living. He seems to accept others as they're and in a way comes back to a "normal" life, distancing himself from egocentric thoughts. He makes the audience both laugh and think, creating a happy-sad effect. This is the gist of his style. David Richards of the *New York Times* tells, "I don't know if Spalding Gray is having a more interesting life than the rest of us, but he certainly is telling it better" (Quoted in Salz 131). Gray knows how to bring his experiences into his own work of art.

Psychoanalytic theory focuses on abstract ideas about the psyche, and the truth about psychological characteristics is thus revealed. Psychotherapy is based on the acting of the patient in the presence of an analyst. Through these enactment sessions the patient is expected to come to a state that he/she has certain understanding of the problems. Therefore psychoanalysis can be considered as an ongoing process, a kind of practice like the theatre itself.

Last but not the least; taking the themes of *Impossible Vacation* and *Monster In A Box* into consideration we can say that; there's much psychoanalytic material in these two works. There's this love for and the attempt to escape from the mother, symptoms of psychological disorder, sexuality, guilt and trying to overcome all these psychological difficulties through storytelling. We should note that Gray's work is evolved through many performances and it's an ongoing process quite like the therapeutic process itself. When the process is complete the text is written down and the performances end. Therefore Spalding Gray and his monologues provide us with good examples in terms of psychoanalytic theory and theatre.

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