

Impossible Vacation

By Spalding Gray

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Having detailed the agonies of writing a book in his monologue *Monster in a Box*, Spalding Gray now gives us the monster itself: a convulsively funny, unexpectedly moving novel about a man eternally searching for a moment of protected pleasure even as he is permanently incapable of finding it.

Brewster North witnesses his mother's madness but misses her suicide; searches frantically for enlightenment in the Poconos and zipless sex in India; suffers family ennui in Rhode Island and a nervous breakdown in Amsterdam. In the process he emerges as a hilariously complex everyman. And as Gray narrates his hero's free fall, he confirms his own stature as one of our funniest, most eccentric, and most engaging storytellers.

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Impossible Vacation By Spalding Gray Bibliography

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Protagonist Brewster North careens from Provincetown to the Himalayas searching for Eden in this work of darkly comic performance art on the page, executed with great elan by acclaimed monologist Gray.

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From Library Journal

Brewster North needs a vacation. But first he needs to find the stability from which to take a vacation. In this disturbing tale, Gray relays Brewster's quest to reconcile himself to his mother's mental illness and eventual suicide, while his own behavior begins to reflect his mother's as he treks across the planet. Brewster seeks vacations from vacations in this pursuit to find ultimate meaning and contentment. The reader follows him from modeling to acting jobs, from his ascension of the Himalayas to his descent to the depths of the Grand Canyon, where he confronts his own dark psyche. Along the way, Brewster finds Meg and develops the relationship that allows him to recover from his bouts of depression. Through Gray's tale, the reader comes face to face with the disturbing aspects of mental illness and finds the courage to overcome the terrors of that state of mind. For most collections. Previewed in Prepub Alert, LJ 1/92.

- *Brack Stovall, Carrollton P.L., Tex.*

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From Kirkus Reviews

So here it is at last, the ostensible subject of Gray's latest stage (and, come the spring, screen) monologue *Monster in a Box*: a first novel that reads like an existential autobiography and has his mother's suicide (a longtime Gray subject) as its core. Little Brewster North is on a Rhode Island beach with Mom when his uncle gives him a monkey mask from Bali, a WW II trophy, and we witness the birth of a child's imagination. A lyrical opening, but Brewster's happy childhood crumbles when Mom's zeal for Christian Science turns to craziness. Though wanting to end his emotional dependence on her ("it was too sticky and warm to be right"), Brewster cannot rouse himself to fly the coop until he's 25; then he finds a girlfriend (Meg) and acting work in upstate New York. He is on vacation in Mexico when Mom kills herself. This feeds Brewster's guilt, and a dark fear that Mom/Medea is not finished, and may somehow kill her children too. It's about here that we long for the distance that Lawrence achieved from his mother in his autobiographical *Sons and Lovers*; but then, mercifully, up pops the Gray of the monologues, with a wonderfully funny account of a failed attempt to bring experimental theater to Middle America. The work's second half becomes a roller-coaster ride as Brewster punishes himself for not saving Mom by arranging his own "fast and total disorientation of the senses." His breakdown begins in India, blooms in Amsterdam (he has sex in a gay bathhouse), and rages on in New York; his brazen affair with a groupie finally provokes a breakup with the loyal Meg. After some time on the road, he ends his story, arbitrarily, in the Grand Canyon. Although it fails as a novel, this sui generis work has some of the best writing about sex since Henry Miller and some of the best writing about a breakdown since Sylvia Plath; its eccentric charm should enlarge Gray's already considerable following. -- Copyright ©1992, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved.

Users Review

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