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## GALWAY ARTS FESTIVAL

# A comic voyage into a man's mind

*Spalding Gray*

Great Southern Hotel

Victoria White

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**H**E sits at a table with a glass of water in front of him and talks for two hours.

Talks about himself? Well not really, but the construction of character in the monologues of Spalding Gray, the American writer and actor, seems complex, reality magnified to become fiction.

Gray's *Anatomy*, the monologue performed last night at the Great Southern Hotel, is a comic voyage into the mind of a man who has turned 50 and who embarks on a mad bout of hypochondria about an eye ailment rather than face commitment, age or death.

It presents a hilarious bazaar of alternative remedies, from a crazed Filipino butcher to a Christian Science therapist who insists that the patient be "faithful" and see no one else: "I'm seeing this Chinese guy, but it's nothing serious," admits Gray.

It ends with a return to good old common sense, the kind that Gray's "Scotch-Irish" ancestors would be proud of — except that self-acceptance involves vats of alcohol, marriage and a cigar.

You could, for the sake of context, place the monologue in the long tradition of New England struggles with guilt. But Gray's act is more obviously linked to the American institution of the neurotic anti-hero, the best-known being Woody Allen.

Gray never leaves the table, but he uses his huge eyes and the manic gestures of his endless arms to give the impression he could explode off the stage at any minute, enhancing this with sudden bursts of volume.

It's an extraordinary performance which is sometimes very funny. It doesn't, however, achieve much greater depth than does the mind of the neurotic portrayed so that this writer had a sense of being stuck a little long in the shallows.