

Tribhuvan University

Desire and Disease: Psychoanalytical Study of John Barth's

The Floating Opera

A Thesis Submitted to the Central Department of English

In Partial Fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of

Master of Arts in English

By

Lok Man Rijal

University Campus

Kirtipur, Kathmandu

July 2009

Tribhuvan University
Central Department of English
Kirtipur, Kathmandu

Letter of Recommendation

Mr. Lok Man Rijal has completed his thesis entitled “Desire and Disease: A Psychoanalytical Study of Barth’s *The Floating Opera*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from 2065/05/01 B.S. to 2066/03/27 B.S. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for viva voice.

Mr. Rajendra Panthi

Supervisor

Date: -----

Tribhuvan University
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Approval Letter

This thesis entitled “Desire and Disease: Psychoanalytical Study of Barth’s *The Floating Opera*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Mr. Lok Man Rijal has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date:

Acknowledgements

I welcome this opportunity to thank Mr. Rajendra Panthi, Lecturer at the Central Department of English, T.U., who supervised this research work. His wide-ranging knowledge and study have led to many improvements in the substance and helped me give the final shape to this thesis.

I would like to extend my profound gratitude to Prof. Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head of the Central Department of English for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research. I am equally grateful to those teachers who offered me invaluable suggestions. I would like to thank my friends and those who supported and encouraged me directly or indirectly in this course.

I am heavily indebted to my parents, Padam Rijal and Khima Rijal, and relatives who constantly supported and provided encouragement to carry out this research work. Last but not the least, I extend my thankfulness to my dear wife, Shila Rijal and daughter, Ismu Rijal for their kind help and encouragement during the preparation of this research. Finally, I am thankful to Jitendra for his help in bringing this research work into this present form.

July 2009

Lok Man Rijal

Abstract

This present research work attempts to study Barth's *The Floating Opera* from psychoanalytical perspective. The study explores the protagonist Todd Andrews's repressed desire of not being sexually potent through his own narration of his past which he recreates in order to project himself as a perfect man. As Todd suggests that his sexual failure might have resulted from his two troubles: the subacute bacteriological endocarditis, and infection of his prostate gland. But he tries to conceal the real causes of his failure. Though he promises to give the reader the explanation of his disease, he delays for fear of being exposed to the reader and himself. Todd tells a fictitious tale of his sexual encounter with Jane Mack to assert his sexual vitality, but he fails to prove himself as sexually active as his repressed mind cannot hide anything. Thus, this thesis dramatizes the protagonist Todd's consciousness of his sexual impotency and his attempt to hide it from both the reader and himself.

Contents

Page No.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

Chapter I: Life and Works of John Barth 1 -7

Chapter II: Psychoanalysis: A Theoretical Framework 8-22

Chapter III: Desire and Disease *in* Barth's *The Floating Opera* 23-40

Chapter IV: Conclusion 41-42

Works Cited

I. Life and Works of Barth's Fiction

This research is the psychoanalytic study of American novelist John Barth's first novel, *The Floating Opera* published in 1957. In the novel, Barth presents postmodern characteristics found in the protagonist Todd Andrews, who is a fifty-four-year-old lawyer living alone in the Dorset Hotel in Cambridge, Maryland. An expensive dresser, cigar smoker, and chronicler of his own life, he suffers heart and prostate trouble. But he always tries to hide the causes of his disease. Never married, he enjoys an intimate relationship with Jane Mack, his best friend's wife. He claims he is not a philosopher, yet he makes a habit of applying his own eccentric notions to his own and other people's lives, often with grim results.

John Barth is a leading contemporary American novelist and short-story writer. He is known for the postmodernist and metafictional quality of his work. So, his fiction and essays have helped define literary postmodernism. The author of ten novels, four volumes of short stories, and two books of non-fiction, he has flourished as an eminent exponent of experimental narrative, respected teacher of creative writing, spirited performer on the lecture circuit, and thoughtful observer of the world literary scene. Josephine Hendin comments that Barth turns our concern with "identity," with the "(post)modernist search for who or what we are, into a pure entertainment" (qtd. in Hoffman 262). This shows that like other modern and postmodern writers, Barth took art to explore the meaninglessness of life and fragmentation of personality. His fiction continues to maintain a precarious balance between postmodern self-consciousness and wordplay on the one hand, and the sympathetic characterization and "page-

turning” plotting commonly ascribed to more traditional genres and subgenres of classic and contemporary storytelling (Harris 6).

Born in 1930 in Cambridge, Dorchester County, Maryland, as one of fraternal twins teasingly named Jack and Jill, Barth often uses the motif of doubling and his native Chesapeake Bay area in his writing. He studied briefly at the Juilliard School of Music and earned his B.A. and M.A. in creative writing at Johns Hopkins University. Further study for the Ph.D. was put off in favor of a variety of college posts to support his growing family. He held academic positions first at Pennsylvania State University, then Suny Buffalo, and finally Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, a stable position of professor of creative writing that allowed him to engage in his hobby of sailing the Chesapeake. He is now retired as an academic, though he continues to write.

Barth started his writing career with two novels set in his native Maryland in the 1950s *The Floating Opera* and *The End of the Road* (1958). These first two novels can be classified as novels of ideas, for the basic conflict revolves around a clash of philosophies. They demonstrate a number of Barth’s later preoccupations, such as consciousness of the infinite number of theoretically possible actions, always, however, limited to the finite actions we can in reality undertake. Two attitudes, according to Barth, may be employed in this dilemma: paralyzed solipsism or exuberant role-playing. The absence of absolute values is evident in these early fictions, as is the possibility of existentially creating values that are less than absolute but no less binding. The urge to look back and reassess is strong: the protagonist of the first novel is writing in the 1950s about his decision to commit suicide in 1937, while the narrator of the second has undertaken a psychiatric treatment in the form of “scriptotherapy,” which has

him writing out his life experiences. In his later fictions Barth treats similar themes, but moves increasingly towards formal experimentation, metafiction, parody, the use of fantasy and what he calls “received stories” (traditional tales and myths).

In *The Floating Opera*, the narrator and central character Todd yearns to build a boat and sail away from what he sees as a meaningless existence into a completely private life, but he manages neither to finish a boat nor to sail away. As if to make up for his first narrator's failure and to distance himself from the doubt and indecision that plagued that character, Barth has since then thrice built seaworthy boats of words and set fictive sail down the Chesapeake Bay toward the open sea. He first ventured forth in the guise of the ex-C.I.A. agent Fenwick Scott Key Turner in *Sabbatical* (1982); then, as a blocked writer, Peter Sagamore, in *The Tidewater Tales* (1987).

Barth's Todd Andrews in *The Floating Opera* has attracted much attention from many critics. Maurice Couturier regards him as an existential hero as he asserts that “Todd shares the aloofness of Beckett's Murphy who tied himself naked, to his rocking chair and could spend hours of salient contemplation in the dark. Todd, too, spends hours staring at his staring-wall” (16) Similarly, commenting on the nature and the activities of the hero, Chris Conti writes: “[T]he hero of an absurd universe [who] has won the admiration of critics contemplating his dilemma and convinced some that his absorbed suicide was undertaken in a bid for existential liberation from the constraints of a rationalized age” (535).

In *The Floating Opera*, C.B. Harris poses the question, through the character Todd Andrews. He believes that absolute values might not be

acceptable. Although Harris eschews a traditional plot for a narrative like that floats on the tide of his narrator's imagination, the bulk of the story follows the events in one day of Todd's life as he decides not to commit suicide. He says, "His ultimate judgment is that there is no final reason for committing suicide [. . .] or for living. One might regard oneself as a rabbit shot on run, condemned to death but not yet dead, and with some minutes left to consider the course of action" (9).

True to his lifelong fascination with twins and doubles, and his rage for symmetry and fictive order, both Barth's first and last novels are floating operas, twinned mirror images of each other, reflecting the beginning and end of "riffs that I've been noodling for 40 years. [. . .] Floating operas, water-messages and night-sea journeys, lost paths and last voyages" (Jordan 87). *The Floating Opera* is an appropriately complicated texture of riffs and motifs, reflexive images and echoes from his other books. But while it tinkers with time and flouts the very possibility of order with the inventive comic skills of one of Barth's favorite authors, Laurence Sterne, it manages at the same time to impose a symmetrical order every bit as contrived and pleasing as any of those of another of his 18th-century favorites, Henry Fielding. *The Floating Opera* is, then, its own complex and complete self, but it is also the satisfying last chapter and tying up of a much larger 12-volume work, the remarkable and altogether noteworthy opera and virtual voyages of John Barth.

With all this, the novel does manage to be a substantial personal memoir as well. Many readers will have heard much of the story before in interviews and essays here and there: the tale of the twins Jack and Jill Barth, of the author's Maryland childhood, of his first marriage and his children, of his academic and

literary career and of his second marriage to the woman to whom he has dedicated the last six of his works. All the expected (and unexpected) anecdotes and revelations are here, but they do not supply the answer to Mr. Barth's important narrative question: they do not tell who he is.

In the sixties, Barth became an important leader in the post-realist movement. Barth once told a group of students, “What the hell, reality is a nice place to visit but you wouldn’t want to live there, and literature never did, very long” (qtd in High 201). He began his attack on the tradition of realist literature with *The Sot-Weed Factor* (1960), set in Colonial times in Maryland. It is written like an eighteenth-century novel. Actually, it is a big joke. Barth is showing us how foolish such a novel becomes when written by a twentieth-century author. This is part of his theory that the literature of the present era is a “Literature of Exhaustion” -- the title of a famous essay by the author. Modern writers are experiencing the “used-upness of certain forms (of literature) or the exhaustion of older possibilities” (High 201). In *Giles Goat-Boy* (1966), he tries to create new forms and possibilities. Like Vonnegut, Barth uses here the methods of science fiction to create a new myth (or allegory) for the world. The whole world is divided into two competing university campuses. Each campus is controlled by a computer. The computers are at the same time “perfectly logical” and completely crazy.

Barth’s another famous novella *Lost in the Funhouse* (1968) is about a family on a trip to the beach. Actually Barth is writing about the terrible problems of trying to write a story. He fills the story with worried comments about his own writing. Clearly, he is not satisfied with his own work: Peter High comments, “What is the story’s theme?” “A long time has gone by without

anything happening [. . .]” “To say that Ambrose’s mother was *pretty* is to accomplish nothing; the reader’s imagination is not engaged” (202). In the end the story breaks down completely. In *Chimera* (1972), Barth enters the story as a character and says that he has lost track of who he is. His name appears to him just a bundle of letters and the whole body of literature a string of letters and empty spaces. Like Ronald Sukenick, he has decided that literature “does not exist” (High 202). However, in later novel *Letter* (1979) and *Sabbatical* (1982) he became less experimental and more traditional.

In this way, Barth has covered every issue what we have come to call in the postmodern era. The trajectory of those works resembles an ongoing postmodernist critique, recurrently exposing the linguistic and philosophical grounds on which our conceptual castles unsteadily sit. Barth almost always problematizes in the novels of the pair whatever philosophical position he seems to have arrived at in the first. For example, *The Floating Opera*, on which the present research is based, apparently makes a case for ethical subjectivism. After concluding that in a world without absolutes suicide is no more rationally defensible than choosing to live, Todd Andrews further considers whether in the real absence of absolutes, values less than absolute might not be regarded as in no way inferior and even be lived by.

Although numerous critics have studied John Barth’s *The Floating Opera* from existentialist and postmodernist perspective, they have not yet explored the text from the viewpoint of psychoanalysis. Hence, this researcher seeks to study the novel from the psychoanalytic perspective.

The thesis has been divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents an introductory outline of the work -- a short elaboration on the hypothesis, a

glimpse of John Barth and a short critical response. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of this entire work. The second chapter tries to explain the theoretical modality briefly that is applied in the textual interpretation. It discusses the psychoanalytic theory along with its origin as a theoretical tool to analyze the text.

On the basis of the theoretical framework established in the second chapter, the third chapter analyzes the text at a considerable length. It analyzes how Barth dramatizes the protagonist Todd's consciousness of his sexual impotency and his attempt to hide it from both the reader and himself. Finally, the fourth or the last chapter sums up the main points and the findings of research work.

II. Psychoanalysis: A Theoretical Framework

Psychoanalysis is a theory which emerged in the late fifteenth century in Europe and developed in the nineteenth century, especially by Sigmund Freud. It is applied in literature, sociology, anthropology, ethnology, religion, mythology and so forth. Now, it is widely used in Radio, T.V. or film. It is a theory which studies the different parts and mechanisms of human mind so as to explore the underlying dream wishes, especially the desires regarding sexual interest. It is a method of reading patients' dream, speech, emotional reactions and bodily symptoms by interpreting the free associations of the patients. Freud listened closely to the significance of his patients' silence as well as their talk, their repression as well as their expressions. This investigation of the patient shows that everything signifies something, everything and every thought the patient expresses has its internal meaning. All these meanings and significances do have their different interpretations. It is through the manifest dreams we can understand the deeper or repressed desires of any psychic or neurotic patient.

Psychoanalysis is a method of mind investigation and especially of unconscious mind. In that sense it is a kind of therapy of neurotic patient. Sigmund Freud, who lived his life in Vienna died in London in 1939, has discovered psychoanalysis by synthesizing ideas and information coming from different theoretical and clinical directions. According to Freud:

Psychoanalysis is the name (1) of a procedure for the investigation of mental process which are almost inaccessible in any other way, (2) of a method (based up on that investigation) for the treatment of neurotic disorder and (3) of a collection of psychological information obtained along three lines, which is gradually being

accumulated into a new scientific discipline. (*An Outline of Psychoanalysis* 32)

It is only after the nineteenth century that it has widely been used in literary studies, especially through the work of Sigmund Freud and Jacks Lacan.

Psychoanalysis has been a perfect means for drama interpretation which attempts to remove social problems by means of uncovering hidden desires and wishes of a neurotic patient. It accepts and takes everything easy what our society and morality forbids.

To understand the function of human mind, first of all, we have to study about the mechanism or the structure of mind; Freud distinguished three structural elements within the mind, which he called the Id, the Ego and the Superego:

The Id is that part of mind in which are situated the instinctual sexual drives which require satisfaction; the Superego is the part which contains 'conscience'; viz. socially – acquired control mechanisms [. . .] While the Ego is the conscious self created by the dynamic tensions and interactions between the Id and the Superego. (*Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis* 7)

It shows that human mind contains three parts: Id, Ego and Superego. The Id is guided by a pleasure seeking principle. It always tries to fulfill our libidinal desires. Superego is a morality seeking principle which always tries to create restrictions, boundaries and obstacles against the fulfillment of our libidinal desires. Finally, the Ego plays the role of a mediator between Id and Superego and tries to maintain balance between them. This further shows that there lie the

actions and interactions between the different parts of the human mind. It is a tension between the Id and the Superego.

According to Freud, we have two different types of dreams: latent dream and manifest dream. Latent dreams are the hidden desires that are lying in our unconscious mind and always try to come out. Similarly, the manifest dreams are the surface actions and desires which are applicable and fit to the society. They are the distorted or substituted desires of latent dreams. Repression is the important factor which always works as a translator of our latent dreams. It distorts the dreams of our unconscious mind and controls our libidinal desires from coming out. Repression allows manifesting the latent dreams in two ways: a) Condensation b) Displacement. In Condensation, multiple dream thoughts are combined into a single element of the manifest dream; every situation in a dream seems to be put together out of two or more impressions or experiences, whereas in displacement, the effects associated with threatening impulses are transferred elsewhere, so that, for example apparently trivial elements in the manifest dream seem to cause extraordinary distress. Thus, the condensation and displacement work as the agent of combining and transferring human dreams in the manifest stage.

Illness or neurosis represents a variety of psychiatric condition in which emotional distress or unconscious conflict is expressed through various physical, psychological, and mental disturbances. Anxiety and frustrations, acute and chronic pains, phobias are the symptoms of psychic disorder. The term connotes an actual disorder or disease, but under its general definition, neurosis is a normal human experience, part of the human condition. Kenneth Eisold retains Freud's three fold meanings of psychoanalysis in the following lines:

It is, first, a school of psychology that emphasizes the dynamic, psychic determinants of human behavior and the important childhood experiences in molding the adult personality. Secondly psychoanalysis refers to a specialized technique for investigating unconscious mental activities; psychoanalysis is a method of interpreting and treating mental disorders, especially psychoneurosis. (*Normal and Abnormal* 179)

This theory also studies the problems like disturbances in an individual capacity to feel warmth, empathy, trust, and sense of security, identity, stability, consistent emotional closeness, and stability in relationship with other human beings.

Freud further talks about the forces of work at human beings. He recognizes two fundamental forces – Eros and Thanatos. The first one denotes the force of life instinct in human life. The instinct of Eros is better known as love or sex of life instinct. Love and sex are the inevitable parts of human life instinct. Love and sex dominate the psyche of the person. Every human body seeks to fulfill psychological needs such as hunger, thirst, breathing and satisfaction. In Freudian psychoanalysis the most motivating force of life is libido. It means the energy of sex motive. In one side sex instinct is a destructive force by life that ruins person and it collapses morality. In another side sex is the energy for creature and intellectual source of life instinct.

Death instinct, Thanatos is a vital force of living organism. Every organism follows its own path to death. The feeling and behavior of human beings, therefore, somehow reveal death instinct. The aggressive behaviors, destructive will and hostile motives are manifested in death instinct. Freud has

given more emphasis on hostility and aggressiveness of human behavior. Life and death instincts are closely related with each other. Some traits of life and death instincts are interrelated and inseparable. These antagonistic forces are always inseparably fused in human activities. It creates ambivalence of instincts. Always sexual violence is the result of sexual depression in the mind or psyche of persons. Human being is much stricter in the context of sex.

The acceptance of life and death instincts are separate entities having opposite goal can be challenged in the psychodynamic of abnormal behavior, Freud writes:

The two instincts are not to be looked on as opposed and mutually independent forces. Behavior primarily motivated by life instinct may have strong component of death instinct and vice versa. It is only through the neutralization of destructive urges by constructive ones that we are able to keep going a tall. (*Normal and Abnormal* 158-59)

The life drive can be divided into two groups. The Ego, which fulfills organic need of nutrition and self preservation; sex drives expression and repression of the inner sexual desire of a person. Freud makes an abstract division of mind into three levels unconscious, conscious and subconscious.

The person who is aware about his actions and behaviors at present is in the conscious stage. In this stage order, system, rule, logic, morality, ethics play the dominant role while performing different activities, quite contrary to this unconscious stage is the stage where our repressed thoughts and desires lie in chaotic, infertile, and primitive in nature. They could be revealed by the slips of

tongue, dreams, inner conflicts and neurotic symptoms. Similarly, the desires that lie within our memory are the desires of the subconscious stage.

The symptom in psychoanalysis arises through repression; symptoms emerge when strong emotional reactions are repressed from the conscious mind into the unconscious. They simultaneously became displaced onto the body. Displacement is also central to Freud's theory of symptoms and dreams. Displacement involves the shifting of an emotional reaction from one part of one's life or one area of body to another.

As we thoroughly study Freudian psychoanalysis it has undercut the traditional notion of reality, truth and order. For him dreams do have their meanings and they are not the useless things. Dreams are more real than reality. Every actions and desires that occur in our dreams are more real than the actions that we do in our conscious state. He believes that our unconscious part never lies. Whether s/he desires or not his/her our unconscious is more real than that of our desires in the conscious state. Meaning comes through the interpretations of our dreams. Dream is the means by which we can manifest our hidden, concealed or forbidden desires in our mundane or daily life.

Thus, he views that the values, norms, social standards, morality, justice, and so on are the false as well as artificial things. To understand or find out the truth or reality one should study the dream, actions done through our unconscious mind, desires that are forbidden to come out and so forth. The dreams are open-ended in nature; the meaning of a dream is formulated and reformulated in the act by describing it. This shows that there is no fixed and final truth. Truth and fixity are the matter of interpretation.

According to Freudian symbolism, if you dream about a long or penetrating object such as a snake, knife, or sword, the symbol refers to a penis; if you dream about a receptacle such as a jewel box, care on pocket, and the symbol is vaginal. Regarding the issue of dream interpretation Freud himself has said:

For the detective – like Freud, everything about a person was interpretable – everything signified something, every thought that the patient expressed or found himself unable to express was grist for the psychoanalytic mill. The substitution theory of transference indicates that these acts of interpretation always work in two directions, back and forth between the patient and the doctor.

(Beyond the Pleasure Principle 40)

In this theory, individuals marked by limited intelligence, emotional instability, personality disorganization and character defects can be labelled as abnormal behaviors what leads a person to engage himself into abnormal or irrational activities. The activities done by such persons are always non – desirable to the moral society. Similarly, ‘neurosis’ is a mild form of nervous disorder with no apparent organic cause. It is therefore, a functional mental disorder arising from inner conflicts, emotional stress, and frustration that may produce a variety of symptoms. It is also called functional for the function rather than the structure of nervous system are impaired.

Freud originated the term psychoneurosis. He believes that the casual factors behind it can be roughly found in the first six years of life and in this stage of life the personality or ego is too weak and afraid of censure. The child during this period is guided by the emotional desires/activities which the social

convention does not allow. Ego has to tussle with child's id -- guided impulse which makes it weak. This long repression of the basic drives of life ultimately takes the pathological form. So, the general causes for the development of neuroses can be unfavorable for the early environment. For they are victims of maternal over protection, rejection, excessive fondling pathological parental attachment, strict puritanical upbringing, dominating parents, and so on. But Freud focuses on the parental influences on restriction of infantile sexuality. Therefore, he attributes psychoneurosis to the frustration of infantile sexual drives. Severe eating, toilet habits and other restrictions are parentally imposed. Such infantile conflicts remain unresolved reappear in adulthood under the conditions of stress as neurotic symptoms. Hendrick has summarized Freud's explanation on the origin of neuroses in this way:

Freud discovered that all factors contributing to a neurotic reaction are intimately associated with the sexual life of the patient, and the sexual life of his childhood as well as adulthood. In addition, Freud has always recognized heredity as one of the etiological factors [. . .]. But it is also apparent that individuals whose heredity and infantile experiences are not unusually unfavorable may be made neurotic by exceptional emotional strain. (*Normal and Abnormal* 27)

Therefore, for Freud, repression of sexuality especially of infantile nature and weak heredity can lead a person to neuroses.

C.G. Jung, Freud's early associate, defines neuroses as inadequate attempt to adjust to some disturbing situation in his analytical psychology. As he withdraws from the Freudian group by citing excessive Freudian emphasis on the sexual libido, he keeps a different view and says that neuroses arise from a clash

and the source of this conflict is between man's sensual and spiritual aspiration and discord between conscious and unconscious impulses. His ideas on neurotic symptoms formation are:

Jung stresses the importance of repression and inhibitions in the formation of neurotic symptoms. [. . .] The repressed experiences contain memories, wishes, fears, needs, or views with which we have never really come to terms. These buried complexes that have been dissociated from consciousness and relegated to the hinterland of unconsciousness give rise to neurotic symptoms as long as they are denied access or full expression in consciousness. (204)

Thus, the above explanation also shows that Freud and Jung both focus on the role of repression in the production of neuroses.

Though there is variation in classification of neuroses among psychoanalysts, Freud classifies neuroses into two broad categories: 'actual neuroses' and 'psychoneuroses'. Neurasthenia and anxiety neuroses are in actual neuroses whereas conversion hysteria, anxiety hysteria, and obsessive compulsive neurosis fall into the category of psychoneuroses. There is another psychoanalyst, Horney, who talks about 'character neuroses' and 'situation neuroses'. Other psychoanalysts have also typified neuroses in terms of their own perspective and criteria. After all, it is clear that a patient shows symptoms from more than one clinical group.

For Freud, "a neurosis is the result of the conflict between id and ego" (*Normal and Abnormal* 29). The conflict between them arises when ego refuses to accept the powerful instinctual impulses of the id. In such case, the ego

defends itself against them by the mechanism of repression. Anxiety, obsession, forgetfulness, hysteria, heightened irritability, guilty feeling and suicide attempts are psychoneurotic disorders, dominant in a neurotic in one way or the other.

Anxiety is the most common form of psychoneurosis and it is the basic and fundamental system apparent in neurotic patient. Ross says, “a series of symptoms, which arise from faulty adaptations to the stresses and strains of life. It is caused by observation in an attempt to meet these difficulties” (11). For Freud, anxiety is thought of as a signal which warns the ego of impending danger and mobilizes its defensive apparatus. Restlessness, insomnia, palpitation, feeling of insecurity and dizziness are the symptoms of anxiety. Many psychoanalysts have accepted the fact that the source of neurotic anxiety is traceable to some disturbing childhood experience. Symptoms originally arising from such an experience may appear years later when the individual is exposed to a situation that contains some elements in common with the original disturbing experience. The anxiety patient in most cases is hardly aware of the true nature of the conflicts, frustrations, and difficulties that beset him and his symptoms persist over long periods.

In psychoanalysis, obsessive thought and compulsive behavior are also taken as a variety of neurosis. So, it is also known as obsessive compulsive neurosis. Recurring ideas and thoughts that spontaneously occur over which neurotic has no control are called obsessions. According to Freud, neurotic obsession is a situation in which, “the patient’s mind is occupied with thoughts that do not really interest him, he feels impulses which seem alien to him, and he is impelled to perform actions which not only afford him no pleasure but from which he is powerless to desist” (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 160).

According to Freud, obsession has meaning. In obsessional neurosis, the patient's mind is forced to think certain things which are not only tedious but painful as well. His thoughts are obsessive and the actions are compulsive or ritualistic. Psychoanalysts often describe the origin of obsession to the strictness and poor guidance. The home atmosphere of children who later become compulsive is unfriendly and austere. To be more specific, obsessive concern of neurotic is seen as resulting from the unresolved conflict/repression occurring at infantile stage.

Freud says that "the neurotic is a coward about life, one who turns away from reality because he finds it unbearable either the whole or part of it." (*Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* 281). Aversion to sensuality is a stage in which a neurotic is reluctant to the sensual talks because his super – ego is so strong with sexual taboos that he feels it comfortable to live with the illusion of the spiritual fantasy rather than the cold reality of the physical demands. It is the stage like that of a patient when he resists opening his past before the psychiatrist during the course of treatment. This neurotic character is the unsuccessful protestant to his emotional life because this repulsion leads him to be the repository of eccentric symptoms and relegated life situation.

The developed form of Thanatos is irritation or anger. It is an instinct which remains all the time with a man either in hidden or manifest form. If a child does not manifest it in his childhood, the child grows neurotic and his repressed anger bursts into various perverse and aggressive gestures. Thus, the child brought up in a relatively calm environment with remarkable parental care is subject to be the repository of the repressed anger. Freud thinks that the source of abnormal irritation on the neurotic lies in his individual past and he writes:

That is to say, mankind as a whole also passed through conflicts of sexual – aggressive nature, which left permanent traces, but which were for the most part warded off and forgotten: later after a long period of latency, they may come to life again and created phenomena similar in structure and tendency to neurotic symptoms. (*Normal and Abnormal* 126)

Thus, forbidding a crime by ethic is also a crime which a neurotic man has a natural propensity to commit.

When a person realizes what he has done is wrong or evil, he feels guilty. It is his conscience, a part of super ego that distinguishes evil and good. The fear of the internal (conscience) and external (environment) authority is the origin of the sense of guilt. Guilty feeling is also one of the main dangerous components of human psychology and cause of personality disorder. After one has this feeling, neurotic is frequently beset with his past action which his internal authority considers nonsense. Freud believes that the childhood Oedipus relation is the central source of guilty feeling: “There is no possible doubt that one of the most important sources of the sense of guilt which so often torments the neurotic people is found in Oedipus complex” (*Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis* 279). He also writes that guilty feeling is manifest in the need of ‘self punishment’.

Thus, an important feature of early childhood is the development of the ‘Guilt Complex’ or conscience. Initially the child accepts the standards imposed by parents, which are enforced by their reward or punishment approach. With experience and knowledge the child acquires its own standard of behavior, based on observation and parental precept (rule of conducts). Behavior which digresses

from these self – imposed standards arouses feeling of guilt and failure: at times, under certain circumstances, these feelings may be at an unconscious level and like other unconscious and repressed ideas, can give rise to the abnormal behavior.

To get rid of the burden of self – punishment caused by the conscience, a neurotic attempts to commit suicide and it is his absurd logic hastened by the civilization, a sacrifice demanded by the cultural dos and don'ts. In bio-logical term, it is the failure of the life instinct to check the death instinct, a loss of equilibrium which ends in life reaching back to the original in organic state.

Neurotic, dispersed of these symptoms, cannot enjoy his life because he can only remain painfully aware of his condition for he can neither fight with them nor he can prohibit them. Due to this condition, he can enjoy neither his life nor its achievement. So, a neurotic cannot escape the reality. In this context Freud writes:

The neurotic is incapable of enjoyment or achievement because his libido is attached to no real object, secondly because so much of the energy which would otherwise be at his disposal is expended at maintaining the libido under repression and in warding off its attempts to assert itself.

(Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis 133)

That's why the neurotic can do nothing either physically or mentally. He is like a paralyzed person and to get rid of it, he may attempt suicide.

Freud's theory of psychoanalysis concerns with libidinal energy. No doubt the libidos has somatic sources, it flows to the ego from various organs and parts of body. The major parts of body from which the libidinal energy is

generated are known as erotogenic zones. For Freud, the sexuality is not only the reproductive action to produce coming generation but also it is the source of love, pleasure and emotional satisfaction. Thus, sex is not a whole, but a part of libido.

Freud's formulation of instructive theory, division of mind, personality and mode of thinking, are all great contributions to psychoanalytical theory. His theory of psychosexual development is one of the polemic theories on psychoanalysis because of his denial on conventional concept of sexual activity relating to the function of sex organs at puberty stage. According to him, the sexual attitude develops from the very beginning of childhood though the sex drive of infant is not intensified because of unnatural sex glands and hormones. In his view, the mouth, the arums, the genital give sexual pleasure. From the psychoanalysis of his patients, he comes to know that the roots of the neurotic symptoms of patients are associated with the frustration of sex instincts during early childhood. Freudian unconscious motives always seek to energy into conscious self exerts a contrary force pressing down and inward, the force of life are originally disorganized and unconscious but by the content with objects in the environment it takes shape. Thus, all the unconscious motives have root with past events of incidents. For Freud, the psychosexual development of personality is deeply related with the past events and unfulfilled wishes.

"Sex" in Freudian term means more than affability, not heartedness. He earlier made its meaning narrow by calling it 'erotic'. The firstly ascribed neurosis is not nerdy to sexual causes but in particular to the effects of excessive masturbation. So his conjecture was far from unfounded, given the backstairs condition of master servant relations at the bottom of every care for by hysteria.

These, narrow meanings could exist for no longtime. They were soon discarded because he had discovered that the tales coming furnished by his patients of intention seduction by nurse or governess could claim the psychological truth of fantasy. After that onwards, Freud enlarged the meaning of sexuality:

It covered the entire range “till it covered the entire of his interest. He used it to label concrete sensual acts as well as the feeling of parent for child. “Parental narcissism” and child for parent “interest wishes” ever bond between leader and follower “identification” teacher and student “the analytic transference” so what psychoanalysis called sexuality was by no means identical with impulsion towards the union of two sexes towards producing pleasure sensations in the genitals. (*Freud: The Mind of the Moralist* 151-52)

Thus, his view towards sexuality has got enlarged and is broadened but he seems to have reduced everything to the sex. In fact, he has used this term “sexuality” which varies widely. Without précising it, Freud concentrated in the attributes of sexual every variety of emotions, sympathy, kind attachment, respect and contempt, parental love and filial piety, friendship and enmity, bodily victories and symbolic death, all are associated with the unifying sources.

The following chapter interprets the novel *The Floating Opera* from the psychoanalytical perspective. This perspective is helpful in this novel as the protagonist Todd Andrews shows the signs of his repressed desires. This is the story of Todd who is a confirmed bachelor, convinced nihilist, practicing lawyer, rake, saint, cynic and potential suicide, but finally decides not to commit suicide.

III. Desire and Disease in *The Floating Opera*

In John Barth's *The Floating Opera*, the most important implication for psychoanalytic interpretation is found in the novel's narrator Todd Andrews's narrative of his sexual failure and his father's financial failure which pulled both the father and son on the brink of suicide. Todd is now fifty-four year old man suffering from two troubles: "The subacute bacteriological endocarditis," which has affected his fingers and the "chronic infection of his prostate gland" (2). The father commits suicide but Todd changes his mind about suicide at the eleventh hour as he finds no reason to kill himself. He embarks on a great inquiry about the failure as it places himself on the psychological grip of the past and present. Thus, he becomes self-conscious narrator of an obsessively detailed psychological history which is like a case study based on the actual events of the past. Moreover, as his mind is obsessed with such things, he partakes in shaping, changing and even creating the events of the past. Todd's revelation about himself and his father's failure causes the modification in his narration. He has spent many years examining these two failures while conducting "life-inquiry" of himself and "death-inquiry" of his father (218). In this endeavour, he has worked so hard that he has had several peach basketfuls of rough notes about his research. So, this thesis dramatizes Todd's consciousness of his sexual impotency and his endeavor to conceal it from both the reader and himself.

Todd Andrews's obsession with these two traumatic events is so powerful that he cannot resist his resistance to explore them. He now finds himself totally impotent, completely alone, and absolutely determined to avoid facing the probable cause of his impotency. Though he is conscious of his situation, he refuses to admit the probable cause. So to divert the readers' attention from this

situation, he narrates about his past life. He re-establishes himself in his father's house and childhood home, creates beautiful mistress who helps to establish his sexual energy, and recreates the conditions of his father's failure. Besides, he presents himself as a powerful and victorious man in front of Harrison Mack who arranged his wife, Jane Mack to seduce Todd in exchange for settling their marriage case as Todd once worked as a lawyer. This places himself in the position where he alone will decide its outcome. While narrating his past events, he recreates a more satisfying version of his past, his father, and himself in order to conceal his weaknesses and failures. However, there is no escaping the fact that his unconscious mind unfolds in front of the reader in the course of his narration. He says several times that all the events he narrates have a “dream-like” quality (50). For him, Todd's stories about his past are powerful mixtures of “what really happened” and his dreams (59). This shows that Todd presents the most bizarre kinds of experiences realistically.

Among his past stories, one is associated with his failure to build the first boat. When he failed, he left it unfinished midway and his father used it for firewood. Building a boat itself symbolizes creating something that would salvage him from difficulty or take him to a perfect place where he would experience joy. Perhaps, Todd wanted to build the boat to experience joy that he was unable to get in his existing condition. There was some lack even in his early life. But the failure in his first attempt to build the perfect boat left him much more disappointed. The failure is significant in Todd's desire to build a perfect boat, which only materializes when he manages to build *The Floating Opera* in 1954. So, finally the building of the perfect boat corresponds in time with the perfect ordering of the law case of Mack and with Todd's compulsion to

order his past perfectly. In course of his narration of his past story, Todd speaks his mind as he tells us he regretted that his father and the present house keeper “weren’t dead” (51) because they interfered in his work and he could have succeeded if he had been left to himself to do his work. So he says, “Left to myself, absolutely to myself, I was certain I could build one” (58). At the end of the novel, we see Todd’s need of an “enormous soothing solitude” is achieved immediately after he has tried to kill 699 of his town people (245). He wants to kill everyone as they happen to know about his secrets of his life.

He objectively describes his imagined act of destruction, which creates a terrifying sensation:

Calmly I regarded my companion Cap. Osborn, shouting hoarse encouragement to the Robert E. Lee. Calmly I thought of Harrison and Jane: of perfect breasts and thighs scorched and charred; of certain soft, sun-smelling hair crisped to ash. Calmly too I heard somewhere the sequel of an overexcited child, too young to be up so late: not impossibly Jeannine. I considered a small body, formed perhaps from my own and flawless Jane’s, black, cracked, smoking. . . . It made no difference, absolutely. (239)

At the end of the day, Todd arranges his suicide along with everyone on the board of *The Floating Opera* which is planned to be exploded. Before he sets this plan on motion, he only imagines about the physical destruction of other people. He does not think about his own destruction though he is part of the victim of the destruction according to his plan. So, his body is not thought of destruction, he remains free to think and describe as he imagines to be the sole survivor. He needs solitude and free mind to create his life, a failed life. So, he

does not care about the destruction of others. That is why, he stares at a blank wall in his office to create the law cases, just as he stares at the blank pages on which he is creating his last and perfect boat, *The Floating Opera*. This is Todd's attempt to make compensation for his lack and failure in his life.

Todd does not reveal the cause of his disease to the reader. His act of intentionally hiding the probable cause of his disease indicates that he talks about the causes unclearly. Todd is not ready to accept the fact that it is not possible to conceal his weaknesses from the reader. So he constantly promises to give explanations for odd details. He tries to hide the facts from the readers. He promises to provide explanations for strange things as he says he will explain “as clearly as [he] can the several kinds of troubles” his prostate gave him when he was young (3,5). But he never mentions any of them. He only describes his relationship with Mack and Jane especially about why he did not deeply love either of them. He further tries to explain why he never confirmed the exact date of the suicide decision, but then he admits “perhaps I can't explain why. Indeed, I shan't try” (18). We can see that another excuse is his claim about his fantasy of sailing out to “the endless oceans” in a small boat: “In short, I was running to, not running from or so I believe” (57). Todd makes such ambiguous statements about his motives several times. He never follows these statements that he implies between what he believes and what he really knows. His mind is regressive in such a way that he lets the opportunity of explaining his psychological condition slip out of his hand. So, he never fulfills his promise in the following narration.

The dominant issue that Todd avoids to explain is the issue of his inability to love, which he characteristically delays explaining. When he

describes his triangular relationship between Mack, his wife Jane and Todd himself says that “each of the three of us loved the other two as thoroughly as each was able, and in the case of Harrison and Jane that was thoroughly indeed. As for me – well, I’ll explain in a letter chapter” (18). After evading the issue, Todd changes his mind as he says, “I’ll explain it now” (18). He then tells us about this meeting, Harrison and his seduction by Jane Mack. While narrating the story, he recreates or makes his own objective and rational judgment about the possible reactions of the three of them including himself. We can see his objective that he clearly cherishes. This makes him conclude that love is nothing but “ridiculous” (4). But he has previously said that he loved captain Osborn, one of the hotel roomers whom he met on his important day of his planned suicide and said in unclear terms that “I loved him, if I loved anyone, I think” (46). He has even said that he loved the Macks as “thoroughly” as he could and that they loved each other. This proves that he is either incapable of loving women or incapable of loving them deeply.

Todd knows this reality and takes this conclusion naturally. As he deliberately ends his attempt to rationalize his inability, he soon reconsiders and admits that “the whole purpose of this digression was to explain why it was that I was incapable of great love for people, or at least solemn love. And I see I didn’t explain it yet, at that” (42). He has the fear that the last half of the book will be devoted to explaining his inabilities. So, what he does is he directly refutes the point of the “Coitus” chapter and tries to avoid the reasons of his failure by blaming his lack of seriousness. He fails to explain the reasons of his incapacity for “great love” because he does not want to look for causes as they might expose him. So he only opts to deal with the resulting effects. If he had carefully

tried to consider the causes of his failure to love strongly, he would only have taken help of the external forces, not his psychological ones. So, he no longer wants to be tormented by probing the causes.

Todd wants to protect himself from the causes of his various physical and psychological problems. For this, he consistently tries to avoid clear and specific description of his sexual encounters. In many cases he tries to make his narrative to portray himself as sexually fit and desirable. But if we analyze his narrative deeply, we find that he hides important truth about himself behind his convenient fictions. Todd practices “misanthropic hermitism” to justify his inability to love as he puts on the mask of a saint. He says that “for various reasons” he has “renounced the world of human endeavors and delights” (18). He wants to make his life similar to that of a “Buddhist saint”, and remembers a particular questions of [his] life” with “pleasure” (19). But the pleasure that he talks about is not the pleasure in the true sense of the word. Because we can see that he has worn a mask to deceive the readers. He finds his renunciation of “human delights” useful in order to falsely please himself that it has given him a more active sex life. In reality, it has neither been useful or useless. So, his claim that he has a more 'active sex life' is contradictory. He only says so to flatter his self-image and to think of himself as irresistible to women. An old man of 54-years, Todd wants to emphasize his sexual capability to divert attention from the specific causes of his sexual failures. So, his attempts to conceal the causes of his sexual impotency do not seem to be reliable.

This consciousness of his impotency has tormented Todd throughout his life and as a result of which he plans to commit suicide. He never considers impotency might have caused him to kill himself or the other way round.

Besides, he never directly faces the causes of his failure with Mack's wife Jane. He has said that his “increasingly frequent” subject implies his impotency that occurred in 1936 and 1937 as he mentions “about every fourth attempt” and “about every other attempt” (156). After he comes into contact with Jane, he fails to establish manly relationships. He narrates that he failed with Jane on their last night together. He recalls how she had referred to his clubbed fingers which was in response to his failure as he comments now “my subsequent failure at love making no doubt grew out of that” (220). Here, we have sufficient reasons to doubt about his justification, as he has indirectly confessed to his failure many times.

It was between 1937 and 1954 that Todd kept secret his sexual abstinence. We can conclude by his own estimation that he must have totally impotent as a result of his unavoidable progression of his prostate infection. Todd gives a totally different cause for his lack of sexual activity, though he claims that he was completely “satisfied” by Jane Mack who was “the finest woman I’ve ever slept with” (157). He says that he has not desired anything from “women since the morning she left my vented bed”, (157). Todd then poses the problem from the reverse side as he says that it was not his failure with Jane but her success with him is important, which is a senseless conclusion. Last night they spent in his bed was not satisfying at all. But he had joked saying it had “satisfied his desire for seventeen years” (157). Their affair has “left nothing to be desired” (157). Apparently, for Jane there was nothing to be desired from Todd. So, although he describes himself as a man fully satisfied, he has not been fully satisfied in the past, and at present he is fully unsatisfied man.

Todd does not take the trouble of understanding and explaining the causes of his impotency. Similarly, he even refuses to consider the causes of his heart and prostrate troubles, for he fears that this might lead him to link this to his sexual failure. He has clubbed his fingers too. He says that he has spent three years reading for his “inquiry” during which he read medical books too. In fact, he must have known the reasons. The infection in the prostrate has perhaps affected joints, heart valves, meninges and brain and the spinal cord. As he neglected all this in the past, the permanent sterility must have resulted. Although Todd does not directly confront the information in the book, he populates the text with evidences which are sufficient for the reader to draw conclusion about him. Thus, he cannot help discussing something secret about himself though he does it in an obscure manner.

Todd first discovered his endocarditic when he had a heart attack immediately before his discharge from the army. He suffered from the heart disease at the young age, which he kept secret from others except from the captain John Frisbee. He characteristically concludes that one's illnesses are better if “one keeps their exact nature to himself” as he is scared of the ramifications of the disease (51). He hides his disease because he recognizes the utility of keeping the exact nature of his disease from us. He refuses to see the doctor about his disease because he wants to repress it. So, he gives numerous and often contradictory reasons for his refusal. Throughout the novel when Jane suggests him to visit the doctor, he comments that “not since 1924 had I visited a doctor except socially, and Jane knew that my refusal to do so was no less strong for its being unreasonable” (74). This shows Todd's odd and irrational stubbornness which is associated with his obsessive desire to disregard the laws

of causality. He visits the Doctor, Marvin Rose as he says “Marvin knows that I was unhealthy and that I didn't care to consult a physician about it” (75). But Todd tells Jane that “Rose knows his motives” for not going to a doctor (76). In fact, neither Jane nor Marvin Rose knows anything about the exact nature of Todd's disease. And Rose does not know about his motives, either. When Todd considers an operation on his prostrate, he claims that he does not trust Rose's skill though he says that he is “not opposed to the operation on principle” (137). But Todd does not clarify what the principle really is.

Though Todd visits the doctor Marvin Rose and asks him to examine his heart, which seems to give the feeling that he is not hiding anything from anybody, he does not want the doctor to change expressions during the examination. He does not permit the doctor to do the thorough check-up. This is revealed when the doctor questions, “How am I supposed to know what's what?”(136). Todd refuses to go through the blood test, a needle biopsy, and an x ray. These investigations are important for finding out the causes of his disease but Todd already knows that a source of infection exists somewhere inside and has infected his heart and prostrate. Todd gives no explanation for his refusal to go through the tests. He has some problem associated with his impotence, which is revealed through the doctor's reference to the results of his examination: “‘I don't blame you [Todd]’, Marvin said, walking me to the door with his arm around my shoulders. “ ‘I'd be ashamed to’” (136). We can analyze that if Todd's problems were only of heart and prostrate, they would not be shameful diseases. Todd has something serious and special which makes the doctor embrace him sympathetically. Though we are not told exactly what Todd is suffering from, we may conclude that Marvin Rose has discovered the supposedly shameful disease

that underlies Todd's entire medical profile. So, though Todd encourages the readers to see casual relationships between his two troubles -- heart and prostrate -- he never permits his narrative to include revelation about his specific information. Therefore, Todd cannot help making himself ambiguous, and refusing to acknowledge the whole truth as he wants to create a perfect image of himself.

Todd relates that it was in his father's summer cottage that Jane Mack seduced him. But what happens to Todd at the summer cottage makes us confirm that the tale is his wish-projection only. Todd is obviously motivated by the attractiveness of Jane Mack and falls asleep thinking of her there. His dream which follows immediately is "lecherous, violent- and unfinished" (26). He suddenly wakes to find a "cool, real hand" caressing his stomach; he finds Jane "nude unbelievable! On the edge of the bed" (26). He curses his dream for leaving him "choked with desire" and thus impotent (27). Todd recalls with his senses the physical presence of Jane and adds, "I quiver even now, twenty-two years later to even write about it" (27). The pattern of the experience convinces us to see a resemblance between Todd's dreaming and his writing of the novel. Todd has found in creating the novel that all he has to do is dream his dreams and they are true. Todd awakens from his dream of Jane Mack to his writing of the novel. Jane is literally realized by Todd, the creator who calls her into being by the intensity of his need. He quivers, not to think of Jane, but to write of her. Awakening from a dream to find it real is Todd's metaphor for the therapeutic value of writing a novel for an aging, impotent man "choked with desire" (28).

Then Todd goes on to describe about his war experience. His description of his war experience shows an identical confusion of conception. Todd admits

that he has “no idea what [they] did” and “no idea what [he] was doing there” (61). Nevertheless, he proceeds to narrate a realistic tale of his individual experience during the fighting in the Argonne forest in France. He had two experiences which, like his two “troubles,” do not seem to be related to each other even though they are obvious inversions of one another. As it grows dark, smoke fills the air, and all sound stops; Todd sees a group of German soldiers in a hollow and begins to fire at them. He “could scarcely believe it” (61). At this point, what follows is an embarrassingly obvious fantasy of impotence. Todd relates:

None of them dropped dead, or even seemed to notice their danger. It seems to me they should have counterattacked, or taken cover, or something. I remember very carefully reloading and firing, reloading and firing. It was a hell of an easy war, but how in the world did you go about killing the enemy soldiers? (61)

Todd is alone and impotent; he says later, “Reader I’ve never learned where the armies spent their time in this battle” (64). Here, his emphasis on “never” makes us confirm that there was nothing to “find out,” to verify things objectively. When after his experience of intimacy with the sergeant turns to terror, Todd attempts to kill the enemy soldier and grows hysterical at his failure: “My God! I thought frantically, Can’t I kill him?” (66). He kills after his original impotence, just as he succeeds with Jane after his original failure. The experience is similarly dream-like; Todd observes that “scenes changed in this battle as in dreams” (61). When he says of his encounter with the German sergeant that “This time it was I who was in the hollow” (61), he implies, especially through his repetition of “hollow”, that the episode will be the

opposite of his failure to kill which he previously described. Todd is potent, able to kill, when he is in the hollow; when he fires his useless gun into a hollow, he is impotent. When he embraces the German sergeant, he cautions us not to think him a homosexual, but the imagery through which he creates the two episodes reveals that Todd is a strong and manly killer only when another man leaps into the hollow he occupies. He interprets the importance of the scene for us when he concludes that the encounter made a more thorough and systematic man of himself by turning the experience into one which puts him in a favorable position. As the readers, we are left to go through the indistinct presentation of the experience to find as Todd's fantasy disappears and his own history begins. As in other places in the novel, the task is finally impossible as we are given very little direction to know about Todd.

Just like in the seduction scene by Jane, the narrative moves from much frustration to an ideal and realization that is under suspicion. Todd's writing is an attempt to correct what he calls the curse of "imperfect communication" (64). His deepest desire is to achieve that intense intimacy that has always escaped from him. Such intimacy is realized here, and Todd takes pride in it as he says: "Never in my life had I enjoyed such clear communication with a fellow human being, male or female, as I enjoyed with that German sergeant" (65). While Todd notes that the soldier was "considerably older," he does not consciously identify the man with his father, although he asks, "What validity could the artifices of family [. . .] claim beside a bond like ours?" (65). Todd's guilt about his father's death surfaces as he creates a new opportunity to act out and control the one experience that is, as he himself accepts, the central event of his life.

Moreover, Todd's fear of having a shameful disease has created a barrier behind which he dares not look. When he tells us about his earliest sexual experiences, he pretends to give us a real and objective description in order to emphasize as clearly as possible the absurdity of the sexual act. He first met a girl named Betty June Gunter. The encounter with her in his bedroom on his seventeenth birthday is problematic for several reasons. We can judge his reliability by his description of the encounter. It is an adolescent person's act, that, at the very instant of his first sexual climax, turns to a mirror and shows what he is doing with complete objectivity. Todd does not realize what his acceptance indicates about his inability, even then, to commit himself entirely to an emotional encounter. The mirror, as Todd's symbol of objectivity reflecting "only what it sees" (121), is undermined by the intense subjectivity of Todd's response: "Betty June's face buried in the pillow, her scrawny little buttocks thrust skywards; me gangly as a whippet and braying like an ass" (120). Todd compares himself to the dog and the donkey, a baby, a goat, a lion, and a stallion. He is mocking the idealistic pretensions of sex, "the flights of intercourse," by supposedly showing its animal quality with complete objectivity (121). The similes, however, like his posture behind and above the girl, reveal his concept of the sexual activity as degraded and degrading thing. His first sexual contact, involving a "sophisticated, worldly, informed," "experienced" girl, who was "no beginner" and who became a prostitute like her mother before her, is a source of disgust for Todd because he fears her as the contaminating source of his disease. So, at some point, Todd comes to associate sex with his diseases and uses their possible connection to explain his obvious lack of interest in sex which has plagued him for so long.

After describing his second experience with Betty June in the whorehouse, Todd assures us that he is “reasonably confident that it was Betty June” (138), which raises an element of uncertainty. Like the seduction and the battle, this experience takes place in a context where Todd can claim, as a result of drunkenness, that he is not sure what actually happened. Moreover, our suspicions are increased when Todd claims that he can “scarcely wait to get a woman” in spite of the fact that he is nearly collapsing from the “fiery pains” he is suffering (139). The older Todd is telling a story that follows a pattern with which he is painfully familiar, not just as a young man but also as an aging narrator. As his physical pain increases, the desire for sexual outlet increases. For Todd, the psychological pain of his impotence and isolation have caused him to desire sexual strength so much that he imagines the past which confirms his liveliness for him. So, he characteristically sees sexual climax as the release from and therapy for pain, even in situation like the one in the whorehouse when the physical pain results from the infection attacking his sexual potency, hardly making him feel more potent. Todd's insecurity about the reality of his encounter with Betty June is apparent in his comment that he was “certainly suffering to the point of delirium” (130). Although he was in no position to make wise judgments about either himself or Betty June, he never hesitates to make such judgments. He informs us that Betty June was “not a day older than she had been in 1917” and “If six years of prostitution had changed her at all, I couldn't see how” (130); as an imaginative creation she naturally does not grow old. Similarly, in explaining the exact nature of his pain, Todd says he felt “as though a hot needle, not bayonet, was piercing [his] liver? [His] spleen?” (130). The bayonet reference here stresses the tendency of Todd's experiences to go beyond

and ultimately to collapse into each other because they all originate in the same frustration. The encounter with Betty June is another dream that comes to materialize for his convenience for refusing to investigate critically the nature of the experience.

Our surface reading of *The Floating Opera* presents Todd Andrews as a charming figure whose frankness makes us trust whatever tales he narrates. But he does not always satisfy our expectation that he will succeed in creating a logical analysis of his own motivation. If we read closely, we find what seems to be a failure of artistic control on John Barth's part. The failure is to manage the details of the narrative for critical judgment. In some way, we have a strong sense that we are being deliberately deceived while giving much freedom to the author. An example of the problem is the entire chapter which he devotes to the possible cause of Betty June's dangerous motive. After offering the usual explanation that she hated him because he laughed at her, Todd innocently asks, "Don't you agree that this is probably how it was?" (139). The question raises doubt about his clever answer and adds another mystery to complicate the issue even further. He is unable to explain why he thinks so, but he definitely believes that has he not "mentioned the matter [. . .] Betty June would have gone through with the intercourse" (139). What he says here is the crucial point. The question is whether Betty June's hatred for Todd is as obsessive as he claims. Todd gives importance to words which are the creative medium of an artist. As Todd tries to draw the meaning from his mysterious experience, he comes to the point that it is "fairly important (hell, even urgently important) to the understanding of this whole story: things that are obvious to other people aren't even apparent to [him]" (139). His acceptance of his own limitation is fully justified by all that we

have seen of his unwillingness or inability to understand his motives. Though Todd has just shown that he does not really understand anything about Betty June, he says, “[T]hings that are clear to me are sometimes in-comprehensible to others-which fact occasions this chapter, if not the whole book” (140). There is no clarity of vision that he attributes to himself in this chapter. Todd is talking about what we have found to be true for all the major events of the novel. He is the only one who sees clearly because the line between history and invention is one he has drawn, making many of the details incomprehensible to the reader, but not as fully incomprehensible as Todd thinks because he has left his subjectivity on his creations so we can recognize them as his.

When we talk about Todd’s created past, the question of how conscious Todd is of the distinction between history and invented past arises. Even though the text is a richly detailed record of the interpenetration of fact and fiction, we are not able to separate them with any confidence; the reader remains an outsider to much of Todd's life, especially to his motives. However, to come closer to knowing Todd as a person rather than considering him as an artist or a work of art himself is to add a great deal to an understanding of that uncertainly controlled and often weakly presented blending of the real and the imagined in Todd's imagination. As we see the strong pressures on Todd which demands such a merging of truth and fancy, we might be led to a total doubt about Todd's ability to record with accuracy the events of his life. But Todd is always self-conscious of this conclusion which shows that he has consciously created the past to hide his present truth and he tries to present himself flawless.

If we study Barth deeply, we find that he has himself encouraged the acceptance of his novels as alternative realities, imagined lives whose power

resides in their freedom from authenticity. And the critics have basically accepted his encouragement. What we have found in *The Floating Opera* is a much stronger devotion to recognizable human psychology that asserts Barth's loyalty to a common pattern of human motivation and behaviour. Barth, like Todd, claims a degree of freedom from the limitations of mimetic art which the novel reveals to be further interpreted.

Finally, Todd identifies with two other characters in the novel: Captain Osborn and Captain Adam. Each man has, like Todd, built or fitted out a boat to endure extreme weather conditions. Todd identifies with their creation of vessels in which they have weathered storms. Captain Osborn, the one person Todd thinks he has loved, has closely and secretly observed his affair with Jane. He is a kind of voyeur in this sense. He has listened to the lovemaking of Todd and Jane for nearly five years and has been torn between his guilt at listening and the satisfaction he has taken from it. His tension is the one Todd feels as the creator of the novel. Captain Osborn tells himself, every time he has listened to the lovemaking that "right there was something [he]'ll never do again on this earth!" (45), a comment which explains why impotent Todd identifies so closely with Captain Osborn.

Todd's identification with Captain Adam is even stronger and more open. If Adam, presiding over the floating opera show from "on high," is the progenitor of "his brood," then Todd is right when he observes that he is "even more godlike than he" (239) in his power to transform reality and reshape his past. Todd feels the godlike power of making his desires and dreams come true and present Adam to us in a manner reminding us of Keats' use of Milton's Adam as a figure of the dreaming artist who awakens from his imagined world to discover his dream a reality. In this way, *The Floating Opera* constantly dramatizes the repressed need of Todd Andrews to create a reality and a self which conforms his imagined past.

IV. Conclusion

This research on John Barth's *The Floating Opera* highlights the protagonist's attempt to hide his sexual impotency both from himself and the reader. The fifty-four-old Todd (a really odd) Andrews lives the bitter present which is influenced by his past, so while narrating his past he recreates it to fit his interest. He relates how his first attempt to build a boat failed and his father destroyed it, which symbolically reflects his failure in his later life. Whatever he narrates has a dream-like quality. He does all this in order to present a better and perfect image of himself. He is suffering from two troubles: "the subacute bacteriological endocarditis," and infection of his prostate gland. He indirectly blames these troubles for his failure at lovemaking. He spends many years examining his troubles that lead to his sexual impotency. This makes him tormented and plans to commit suicide only to revoke the decision as he finds no reason to kill himself.

As Todd grows older, he finds himself totally impotent, completely alone, and absolutely determined to avoid facing the probable cause of his impotency. Though he is conscious of his problem, he refuses to admit the probable cause because he fears that it would expose his hidden truth. Todd makes ambiguous statements about his motives several times. He never follows these statements. His mind is regressive in such a way that he does not take the opportunity of explaining his psychological condition. So, he never fulfills his promise in the following narration.

Todd creates the tale of his sexual encounter with one of his client Harrison Mack's wife Jane in order to assert his sexual vitality. He dreams that

he had perfect and satisfying sexual intercourse with her. But even in dream the truth slips from his narrative and exposes his impotency. Though he tries hard to hide it, his ambiguous sentences reflect his reality. Todd says that his sexual relationship with Jane satisfied his desire for seventeen years and nothing was left to be desired. Similar fantasy of Todd is associated with Betty June who showed her hatred to him for failing to satisfy her. The psychological pain of his impotence and isolation have caused him to desire sexual strength so much that he imagines a past which confirms his liveliness for him.

When Jane advises him to see Dr. Marvin Rose, he unwillingly visits him but does not want to go for all the medical tests for fear of being exposed. Later he even asks Marvin not to reveal his medical reports. Dr. Marvin comes to know about his shameful disease and holds him in sympathetic embrace. This shameful disease proves Todd's impotency.

Similarly, Todd relates war experience in which he presents himself powerful in order to assert his sexual energy. But even there he fails. He tries to show his love to Captain Osborn but there too he fails to love deeply. His identifications with Captain Adam is also his attempt to project an appealing image of himself in the eyes of others. In this way, Todd Andrews shows the signs of his repressed desires of not being sexually active so, he weaves his tale to hide his failure but he again fails to hide from himself and the readers. The thesis dramatizes the protagonist Todd's consciousness of his sexual impotency and his attempt to hide it from both the readers and himself.

Works Cited

- Barth, John. *The Floating Opera and The End of the Road*. New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1988.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. *American Fiction*. Ed. Anthony Kerrigan. London: Calder & Boyars, 1974.
- Conti, Chris. "Confessions of Todd Andrews: Double Directed Discourse in *The Floating Opera*." *Studies in the Novel* 36.4 (Fall 2004): 533-51.
- Couturier, Maurice. "From Displacement to Compactness." *Critique* 18.2 (Fall 1991): 3-21.
- Eisold, Kenneth. "The Profession of Psychoanalysis: Past Failures and Future Possibilities." *Contemporary Psychoanalysis* 39.1 (2003):1-27
- Freud, Sigmund. *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Trans. James Strachey. London: Hogarth, 1971.
- - - . *Civilization and its Discontents*. Trans. Joan Riviere. Ed. James Strachey. London: The Hogarth Press Ltd., 1973.
- - - . *Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*. London: George Allen and Unwin, 1916.
- - - . *The Normal and Abnormal*. New York: Norton, 1962.
- - - . *An Outline of Psychoanalysis*. Standard. ed. 23 vols. London: Hogarth Press, 1969.
- Harris, C.B. *Passionate Virtuosity*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983.
- Hendricks, Ives. *Facts and Theories of Psychoanalysis*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1934.

Hoffman, Daniel. *Harvard Guide to Contemporary American Writing*. Oxford:

Oxford University Press, 1979.

Jordan, Enoch P. "The Floating Opera Restored." *Critical Essays on John Barth*.

Ed. Joseph J. Waldmeir. Boston: Hall Printing Press, 1980. 79-89.

Jung, Carl Gustav. "On the Relation of Analytical Psychology to Poetry."

Critical Theory since Plato. Ed. Hazard Adams. New York: Harcourt,

1992. 783-91.

Peter, High. *An Outline of American Literature*. London: Longman, 1986.

Rieff, Philip. *Freud: The Mind of the Moralist*. New Your: Viking Press, 1959.

Ross, Skelton, ed. *The Edinburgh International Encyclopedia of Psychoanalysis*.

Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006.