Slavoj Žižek on Henry James' *The Princess Casamassima* and *The Wings of the Dove:* How Can *The Parallax View* Inform Readings of Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish?"

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Abstract

Analyses of J.D. Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish" and its titular suicide are often colored by comparisons with the Author's lived experiences and new-age diagnoses of his post-WWII mental illnesses. Salinger's mental illnesses, however, have been relatively over-sensationalized due to these analyses, and no doubt to explain his reclusive and rejectionist cult personality later in his life. Removing psychiatric *DSM-5* connotations and reanalyzing Salinger's story for its symbolic messaging will address the gap in applying psychoanalytic literary theory to uncover and rationalize the literary phenomena. Slavoj Žižek, the cultural philosopher and Lacanian psychoanalyst, offers an exemplary method of analyzing literature and other aesthetic media using his death drive theory in his 2006 work, *The Parallax View*. Using Žižek's interpretation of selected passages from two Henry James novels, the death drive reveals the symbolic nature of suicide in Salinger's story and the ontological existential rumination characterized by Seymour Glass.

Keywords

death drive, Salinger, Seymour Glass, Slavoj Zizek, psychoanalysis, postwar society, veteran, mental illness, bananafish, parallax view

In "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," American author J.D. Salinger's story follows an omniscient narrator explaining the events of ex-Army Sergeant Seymour Glass's Day on the beach during a vacation in Florida with his young wife, Muriel. While she chats on the phone with her mother in the hotel room upstairs, he's enjoying a brief swim in the waves with a young girl, Sybil, between the ages of four and six, whom he's met at the hotel roughly the day prior. They're playing a made-up game of hunting for 'bananafish' together until Seymour decides to return to his hotel room in the evening, after which he commits suicide. We can glean a few hints from the conversation at the beginning of the story, between mother and daughter, that Muriel's family is concerned for *her* safety, due to their perceptions of Seymour's mental state after being discharged from the Army mental hospital following his return from the War. Muriel insists her parents shouldn't worry about the situation because *she's* not worried, and as readers, we're inclined to believe her until we reach the last five sentences of the story—Seymour kills himself. Readers and scholars, in analytical interpretations, have struggled for clarity across the gap of seeming discontent over Seymour's actions: what happened to *the ex-sergeant* that made him want to pull the trigger so suddenly?

Scholars have looked not only to the earlier events of Seymour's day in the story but also have found it much too alluring to look, instead, beyond the realm of the fiction and into the history of Salinger's personal life and records of mental illnesses. Analyses of Seymour Glass' suicide and Salinger's story have thus led to *DSM-5*-colored diagnoses of concrete PTSD, suicidal ideation, sexual fetishes, and other abnormal behaviors as mere signals; these analyses neglect further examinations as to the nature of the symbolic impasse that led to the suicide, which is essential as it underlines, simply, an existential impasse enabled by the death drive as a message within the plot. Instead, as a story featuring a veteran who kills himself, readers and scholars continue to see it as fiction that can be diagnosed, straightforwardly on a mimetic basis—as symptoms on display for possible answers as to what (and how) was going on with society and in the mind of the fresh American War veteran. This neglects the fictional aspect of the work itself as well as the Author's creative versus 'realistic' (historically factual mimesis/self-confessional) input.

In his 2006 *magnum opus*, *The Parallax View* [1], Žižek outlines his modified death drive theory through incisive analyses of pop culture films; for Žižek, it is a force that is omnipresent in the symbolic parallax gaps of *méconnaissance*, or misrecognition and 'miss-seeing' present throughout the symbolic order of reality (or reality, existence); it is within these gaps that repetition compulsion, or the Lacanian notion of repetition *automatism*, occurs on the symbolic level allowing partial objects to manifest as uncanny 'remainders' persisting beyond the veil of life. Often these objects are transmogrified or take on some culturally recognized form, as these symbolic gaps are 'interruptions' of life creating spaces as suspended voids of inanimation beyond existing notions of life and death. Žižek asserts that encountering these gaps reveals their very essence as unavoidable ideological impasses, and from these gaps—or as we try to *perceive* in *méconnaissance* among perceptions—something manifests as a partial or sublime object. Žižek defines these gaps as the radical core of human existence, or what separates the acting human consciousness from that of other animal species. In his comments on Hitchcock's *The Birds,* Žižek provides a full description of his notion of the death drive:

> It's not a kind of buddhist-striving for annihilation. 'I want to find eternal peace. I want… No, [the] death drive is almost the opposite. The death drive is the dimension of what in the Stephen King-line horror fiction is called the dimension of the undead, of living dead, of something which remains alive even after it is dead. And it's, in a way, immortal in its deadness itself. It goes on, insists. You cannot destroy it. The more you cut it, the more it insists, it goes on. This dimension, of a kind of diabolical undeadness, is what partial objects are about [2, 25:03-25:56].

When repetition compulsion (or Lacanian automatism) occurs, the drive for pleasure (described in Freud's 1920 essay "Beyond the Pleasure Principle") seeks to bury and replace the site of trauma; during this process, the 'sites' of trauma (persecutory components of neurosis) are transmogrified through a cyclical process of ruminating over the trauma itself. The desire for pleasure—in desiring relief from these traumas by ruminating over their occurrences—spins out of 'control,' in conception, and reaches what Lacan called *jouissance*—pushing 'beyond' *The Pleasure Principle* itself and into something degenerative, destructive, and deathly. These 'sites' of trauma, now transmogrified, thus produce radically different perceptions in *méconnaissance,* and the (sublime or partial) objects of 'pleasure' often manifest as monstrous and persecutory phenomena. Jouissance produces a paranoiac effect and thrusts the conscious mind into an in-between; the perception of dissonance from the Other(s) views across these gaps presents one with a 'choice between realities' with which one will begin to question or detach from reality—to do so fully would result in psychosis, for

example. Thus, the death drive, existing in these symbolic gaps of *méconnaissance* and repetition compulsion, is not deathly in itself, as Žižek claims.

Instead, the paranoiac sublime and partial objects and the perpetual nature of the cycle of rumination itself give the death drive its moniker; it is a force that never ceases recreation and re-interruption as mechanical repetition of signifying drive—it is beyond the notion of life itself. While normally the author enjoys the freedom to live both his life and *a life* within the pages, so to speak, as he constructs the plot and writes the characters, in Salinger's case, the death drive at work reveals ontological dissatisfaction with the excess of life as his characters experience various human neuroses. As a result, Salinger's character of Seymour Glass—far from an overly mimetic view of an ex-sergeant's reacclimating to post-war society—is an embodiment of this existential ontological symbolic impasse and this ruminating repetitive cycle on the symbolic level.

1. Flaws with Psychiatric Interpretations of Suicide in Salinger's Story

In "A Perfect Day for Bananafish: Learning the Imperfect Art of Predicting Suicide," a popular 2017 article written for *Academic Psychiatry*, authors Kim et al. examined Salinger's 1948 story for its depiction of clues suspected of suggesting suicide. While the authors claimed that they found tell-tale indicators of suicide, according to their psychiatric criteria, at the same time, they also pointed out the relative surprise for readers and the magnetic pull to retrace Seymour's steps through the story to try to pinpoint his reasoning:

> Upon reading this story for the first time, readers may find themselves surprised, confused, or perhaps shocked by the abrupt ending. Readers may question whether they missed some obvious clues to his dangerousness. Upon reexamination of the story, however, the reader may find that such clues were, in fact, adequately provided [3, p.733-4].

Reading Seymour's suicide places the authors of the article—and many other literary scholars—across a parallax gap over its interpretive meaning; and death drive on a more macro level enables his suicide to become the most sublime partial-object of the novel (aside from the titular bananafish): the dead *Saint* Seymour whose final message commands us to reread him in full from the opening words. The moment readers encounter Seymour's death in the final lines of the story, they actually begin a process of consciously and unconsciously rereading the text from the new perspective that Seymour's suicide *is* the meaning of the text—a plea for help—and as such, it colors each rereading for coded actions; their idea is that by gathering and deciphering textual clues, can we understand this 'story of suicide' as an 'explanation letter' upon which we can gather criteria for 'missed' signs of severe mental illness in mimesis, which can then be reapplied back onto human beings:

> Suicide risk factors are conditions that increase the likelihood that an individual will desire, attempt, or die by suicide at some point in their life... In Seymour's case, his Caucasian race, male gender, and his unstable mental health as evidenced by his psychiatric hospitalization are risk elevating factors. However, it has been argued that assessing risk factors alone is insufficient as they cannot predict an individual patient's acute risk level… Suicide drivers have gained recent attention as a potential target of treatment to thwart suicidal crises, though they are difficult to obtain without a direct patient interview. Nevertheless, there were numerous suicide risk factors and warning signs that were implicit in the story. But, why could we not predict Seymour's apparently imminent death by suicide? [3, p.734-5].

On the beach, he's kind to an approaching child that he's just recently met; he's cracking jokes and creating stories, and he seems on the surface level to be otherwise enjoying his time explaining the fabled bananafish to Sybil. He doesn't immediately come across as a person who's going to kill themselves shortly after, and he doesn't sound like he has one of the most unstable brands of WWII pistols—an Ortgies 7.65 automatic, an overt reference from Salinger—stuffed into the bottom of his holiday luggage. Thus, there's a cognitive dissonance that arises between what we learn about Seymour from his wife and mother-in-law, at the beginning of the story, versus how Seymour behaves on the beach:

> Well. In the first place, he said it was a perfect crime the Army released him from the hospital—my word of honor. He very definitely told your father there's a chance—a very great chance, he said—that Seymour may completely lose control of himself. My word of honor [4, p. 8-9].

If it weren't for his mother-in-law's excessive worries, we would never receive any idea within which to frame Seymour as struggling with mental illness until we reach the very end of the story. It's a picture of Seymour readers aren't yet familiar with directly (through his words), and for most of the plot, it remains unconfirmed until he kills himself; this evokes the immediate question as to what we conceive of as mentally 'normal' versus mentally 'ill' behaviors, recognizably. It's Seymour's wife, Muriel, who, several times during the phone conversation, reminds her mother and readers directly that she's not afraid of her husband or his behaviors. At the same time, it's not just Seymour contributing to the dissonance: it's Muriel who takes the air out of her mother's concerns as if the danger implicit in them just doesn't match Seymour's relatively tepid behaviors:

> "Mother," said the girl, "you talk about him as though he were a raving maniac—" "I said nothing of the kind, Muriel." "Well, you sound that way. I mean all he does is lie there. He won't take his bathrobe off." "My goodness, he needs the sun. Can't you make him?" [4, p. 13].

Once a rereading to gather the clues for suicide takes place, the idea that Seymour may just be a man who's relaxing by himself and doesn't want to get any sun for the day immediately falls secondary to the idea that he is actually isolating himself and has such little joy that he refuses to undress and participate in his own beach holiday. In an objective sense, the idea that, perhaps, his wife may be more in isolation—hidden up in the dark hotel room that day at the beach, on the phone with her mother—than Seymour is outside, looking for bananafish with Sybil, immediately reverses upon itself to confirm the depression hypothesis; the 'solid' evidence becomes questionable. Further, the idea that Muriel may have no interest in making her husband get some sun could suggest that she, too, had given up on the relationship and chose to stay apart from him up in the room—dismissing his habits and behaviors as mere peculiarities of his personality. And while in analysis, it may be possible to see characters enacting mimetic, fragmented representations of depression, PTSD, suicidal ideation, etc., these conclusions remain—just that—as fragmented representations that are far less impactful when they're separated from Salinger's personal history.

Using an author's fiction as a form of diagnosable, written content by interpreting his fictional narrative elements and characters' actions as explicitly self-confessional is insufficient for both literary analysis and psychiatric practice. In fact, to arrive at such diagnoses, psychiatric patient practices involve the important dimension of speech—of which *published* writing is not fully representative—and asking patients targeted questions to elicit truthful (non-creative, fictional) responses about themselves:

> While the first scene provided us with "collateral" information based on a family report, readers observe Seymour in the following scenes directly. Firstly, he is lying on the beach by himself, away from the rest of his family. In the context of the concerns raised by his mother-in-law, this appears to suggest

social isolation. He interacts little with others except for Sybil. Readers are further left to speculate about Seymour's psychiatric instability as he relates oddly with Sybil, telling her fanciful stories with themes of entrapment and death. Finally, in Seymour's interaction with a woman in the elevator during his return to his hotel room, he is noticeably paranoid and irritable, accusing her of being a 'sneak' [3, p. 734].

The moment Seymour explodes about the woman peeking at his feet, our reading of the situation is immediately colored by his imminent suicide, and all notions of analysis are reoriented around his behaviors and *how* he's expressing himself (to reveal his suicide) instead of *what it is* that he's expressing. Prior to that, his behavior with Sybil could be read as either neurotic indulgence of a child's company, or as relatively calm, outgoing behaviors—like that of an old grandpa on a beach vacation, telling harsh make-believe stories for children while playing amidst the waves. Based on a reading of his last day, with no detail from his time in the hospital to go on aside from the obvious implication that he was mentally ill at one point prior, Seymour's suicide is otherwise unexpected:

[The] Mother's reference to Seymour's odd behaviors—driving erratically, making statements about death, destroying family photos—all imply, to some extent, that Seymour may have been behaving recklessly. Acting recklessly or engaging in risky activities is one of the listed warning signs. Furthermore, Muriel's mother continues her call for vigilance, referencing the doctor's warning that "there's a chance—a very great chance, he said—that Seymour may completely lose control of himself." Here, readers are given a clue to his psychiatric instability, which further elevates his risk of suicide [3, p. 734].

Salinger's story elicits a sense of paranoiac anxiety (an early Lacanian concept) in readers with the character's suicide (transactive experiences), and we quickly reimagine the character's day, imbued with an increased recklessness and a potential for random violence once we read that he had a loaded pistol in his suitcase for the entire vacation. A desire for mastery of knowledge over, '*But, why did he do it?'* in Seymour's case then leads to other questions on the forethought in his suicide: Had Seymour been planning to do it this day, or rather, at some point in his near future? And did something trigger his decision on this day? Had he taken the pistol just in case he felt the urge, or to enact planned violence? Did he carry it all the time, even on vacation, or did he pack it expressly for this trip? If he had a plan, was it initially to kill Muriel or himself? If he had no plan, what stopped him from shooting Muriel instead of himself? Had he thought about how easily the gun could fire in his suitcase by accident?

The authors of the *Academic Psychiatry* article used this colored reading of a fictional portrayal of a character to uncover fragmented moments of mimesis for a conclusion that used Salinger's story as "[a]n opportunity to conceptualize suicide risk systematically and formulate an appropriate level of treatment intervention accordingly" [3 p. 735]. Similarly, Eberhard Alsen's 2002 article, "New Light on the Nervous Breakdowns of Salinger's Sergeant X and Seymour Glass," took the semi-autobiographical nature of Salinger's stories to mean that the Author must have been writing confessionally, though again, the extent of which we cannot fully determine without an author's direct admission on every point. For scholars like Alsen, elements of death and war in Salinger's own life have become the 'secret, unread tomes' of Seymour's; and thus, Seymour's story is nothing more than Salinger's 'neurotic explanation' and his own desire to have killed himself while he was hospitalized for psychiatric reasons in Germany in 1945:

Even though Salinger mentions nothing in his fiction about what he saw and smelled at the Hurlach concentration camp, the effect of this experience shows up in two stories. Like Sergeant Salinger, both Sergeant X in "For Esmé - with Love and Squalor" and ex-sergeant Seymour Glass in "A Perfect Day

for Bananafish" served in the European Theater of Operations and suffered nervous breakdowns. But in both stories, we are shown only the symptoms of their nervous breakdowns and must guess what the causes were. The two stories take on a new dimension if we assume that Sergeant X and Sergeant Seymour Glass shared Sergeant Salinger's concentration camp experience [5, p. 384].

In an older 1989 analysis, "Source for Seymour's Suicide: Rilke's Voices and Salinger's Nine Stories," James Cotter came nearer to identifying the undead nature of symbolic suicide in fiction reminiscent of the death drive. That is, suicide is a self-contained message that persists beyond the life of the character to the extent that it colors every other element of the text. Comparing Salinger's loose reference to Rilke—in the book of poems written by the 'greatest' German poet—to Seymour's suicide, Cotter argues that its explanation comes in an intertextual reference to a *feeling* in ontological form; Seymour was based on the suicide explaining its own motivations in "The Suicide's Song" from Maria Rainer Rilke's *The Voices*:

Like the Suicide of Rilke's poem, Seymour doesn't 'want anymore' of this nauseating existence. A phony life only makes him vomit. ... Seymour exercises dietetic self-control by wanting no part of the world's appetite for a 'full pot.' Through a series of references to the stomach, Salinger establishes this theme [6, p. 88].

Collected in English translation by 1977, *The Voices,* like Salinger's *Nine Stories,* is a collection of nine poems and one additional, called "Titlepage." And while Cotter was likely correct to point out Salinger's collection as a tribute to the Poet, what his analysis cuts around is the larger question as to *what* about existence, as depicted in the story, is so nauseatingly unbearable; if, in fact, it were obvious, readers would be less caught off guard by Seymour's suicide at the end—instead, we're baffled and rereading *why* for the *clues*.

The conceptual framework of Žižek's death drive offers a more nuanced lens to examine narratives for partial object characters, both the more mimetic and more symbolic. Unlike a shared conception of a feeling in Cotter's analysis—such as the embodied emotions of a desire for self-destruction—which may constrain interpretation to a monolithic emotional state, the existential question provides for the spectrum of contentious, diametrically-opposed perspectives that reflect the character's interactions with the fantasy and reality of a mimetic work. This duality becomes especially pronounced in Salinger's work, where characters like Seymour Glass become operative symbols for visceral, critical reactions to their existence—and thereby provoke similar, visceral reactions among readers. In this light, the death drive serves as a repository for a more profound literary contemplation on one's existence through culturally shared images as motifs.

2. ŽIŽEK ON SYMBOLIC SUICIDE IN HENRY JAMES' *THE PRINCESS CASAMASSIMA*

In one of the few examples of Žižek wading directly into the waters of literary criticism, his 2006 book, *The Parallax View,* picks up on trends that were popular in critical approaches to literature around the turn of the twentieth century, like New Criticism. It's in his chapter on Henry James where he most clearly describes the symptoms of the death drive in a literary work. He begins by highlighting Henry James as an author whose texts allow for more gaps to open in the symbolic network between perception and interpretation of his fiction, simply due to the language. Žižek claims that the way James nominalizes his writing actually gives rise to inanimate concepts performing roles as if they were subjects. In the example, the (undead) notion of pride is doing the action, as opposed to the person whose pride it was:

It may sound surprising to call Henry James the ultimate writer of history, of the impact of history on the most intimate spheres of experience; this properly historical dimension, however, is discernible even at the level of style: the main feature of James's late style is what Seymour Chatman called 'psychological nominalization,' the transformation of 'John observed X' into 'John's observation was X'; of 'You are not proud enough' to 'Your pride falls short.' Verbs that designate psychic activity or experience are nominalized, and such a procedure puts on stage an abstract entity where presently there had only been a human actor—characters themselves (diegetic persons) tend to evolve into 'anchors for abstractions': 'Thoughts and perceptions in James' world are entities more than actions, things more than movements' … Psychological abstractions require a life of their own; they are not only the true topic of James' texts, but even their true agents which interact… witness heavy use of it [1, p. 125].

In the Interlude at the end of the first chapter, titled "Kate's Choice, or, the Materialism of Henry James," Žižek analyzes the death drive at work in James' three-volume novel, *The Princess Casamassima* (1885-6), through the character of Hyacinth Robinson, an intellectually-gifted young bookbinder whose existential confusion left him vulnerable to radicalization. He was taken in and raised by his Aunt Amanda Pynsent after his mother murdered his father in his early childhood, a story he didn't learn the origins of until he became an adult. Among his friends and acquaintances, Robinson, cannot rationalize his perspective on the beauty of the world; but the cost becomes irredeemable to him once he realizes the fact that it's all been built at the expense and suffering of the most vulnerable members and communities in society.

Throughout the first two installments, he deliberates over whether to carry out a political assassination plot on the Prince—as a symbol for aristocratic, conservative society—the estranged husband of the Princess, Christina Light, a member of the revolutionary order. Instead, we read indirectly that Robinson chose to turn the gun on himself. Thus, *The Princess Casamassima* is a complex social novel series that spins boundlessly around the existential question of the people versus the system of order—civilization—and both sides are presented as disorganized, ineffectual, and prone to senseless violence. To accomplish this, Žižek notes that James' characters are actually symbolic projections of conceptual components of the system interacting in diegesis: the plot is the existential question in dialogue through Robinson's character and his associations:

If anything, James is a true antipode to Proust's 'Bergsonism': instead of presenting the flux of Becoming as the truth of fixed Beings, as the process which generates them, he turns verbs and predicates themselves—signs of the process of becoming, of what happens to things, or of what specifies/qualifies them—into 'things.' At a deeper, properly Hegelian, dialectical level, however, things are much more complex: it is Jame's very nominalizing of predicates and verbs, their change into substantive agents, which in effect desubstantializes the subject, reducing it to a formal empty space in which the multitude of agents interact—somewhat like today's neo-Darwinist theories of subjectivity as the space in which memes fight their battles for survival and reproduction [1, p. 126].

In an 1887 review of *The Princess Casamassima*, an unknown author writing for *The Guardian* also found James' characterizations seemingly uncanny, impassible as mimetic (enough) representations: "The result is that Muniment, Miss Henning, Lady Aurora, Sholto, and the rest are rather extremely clever attempts and conjectures than real life studies" [7]. Žižek proposes that the focus on ego-based transactions inherently includes all of reality, including the symbolic network, for an individual; essentially, objects or concepts are manifest as partial-object characters representative of symbolically impassible cultural phenomena.

These partial-object characters are colored by a *feuillemorte* effect—or the colors of death that overtake the green of a leaf after it falls from the tree and dies; the corpse of the leaf persists in a new state, shaped by and associated with its deadness before it ultimately deteriorates

back into (the void of) the Earth. These characters are stuck in states of in-betweenness throughout the entire plot, repeatedly oscillating between various diametrically-opposed points in their existence. Through a desire to break this cycle, they perpetuate and exacerbate it until it reaches a breaking point—until the cycle is interrupted by something. These characters often die at some point in the narrative and the objects previously associated with them in any way—including the characters themselves, their ontological form—are now colored by their death, and thus take on a new connotative form as a partial, sublime object in the narrative. It is in this way that a character's suicide will always color a rereading of the story.

Žižek describes Robinson's suicide as a result of a radical impasse in the symbolic gaps between parallax views on ideologies. Here, the impasse ceases Robinson's potential for action in the plot, and so the character cannot move forward with reality (make the decision) and he exists mostly as a constitution of an in-between state; as the final seconds are running out for Robinson to exact the assassination plot, he is realizing he can no longer stay in the repetitious cycle of *will-I-or-won't-I?* (rumination). It's at this moment where the radical moment of truth, decision, within the fantasy—that false idea that he could have an infinite amount of time to decide—emerges. The death drive enters the scenic orchestra precisely at the sites where gaps open: these gaps, in Lacanian terms, are confrontations of the Imaginary and the Real through their intersections with and in the Symbolic.

Through the symbolic gap that opens in disturbing the repetitious cycle, suicide emerges as a radical impulse (toward death) to create-anew through destruction; this destruction, while deathly, is meta-purposeless, and in Robinson's case, actually aligns with fulfilling desires and the symbolic message: I could not turn the gun on him because I could not decide (who was *right* or *wrong*). Žižek includes: "The key difference between Hyacinth and James was that James was able to 'work through' his inability to act, his withdrawal from participation in life, to transpose it into the art of writing" [1, p. 128]. What Žižek missed between the lines of his conclusion is that the character is able to 'work through' as well, though differently, because the character is one variant of a literal 'working through' of some existential question.

To trace the source of the emblematic impasse for Robinson, it's necessary to return to the site(s) where the parallax views offer the most widely varying possibilities for interpretation, such as with the moment in *Princess Casamassima* when: "[H]yacinth asked: 'In God's name, why don't we do something?'" and his compatriot Eustache Poupin replied despairingly but, "'Ah my child, to whom do you say it?'" [8, p. 319]. This is the point where Robinson's call to action signals the reader to the closing of the gap within which the character can stay in his fantasy—the point from which the invisible clock begins ticking toward his final decision. The gap begins to close for Robinson because he realizes he cannot decide which group (answer) is more valid and correct, yet he must make a decision on whether or not he fully agrees with his choices from the moment he agrees to pick up the gun; at this moment, Robinson loses sight of the 'better' path for himself—his idealized self in the realm of the Other—and thus also his ability to participate in the fantasy that rumination allows.

The death drive perpetuates the repetitious rumination cycle and manifests Robinson's gun as a partial object, symbolic of the extent to which the ideological impasse can be deadly in its nature of binary opposition or mutual exclusion. In another passage, the symbolic eyes-at-distances are representative of the gaze of desire and fantasy across a parallax gap: "But Sholto only looked at him very hard a few seconds … Hyacinth gazed back at him for the same length of time—what these two pairs of eyes said to each other requires perhaps no definite mention—and then turned away" [8, p. 376]. This is the moment where the differentiation

within the parallax view best reveals the ideological impasse Robinson faces and thus embodies through his final rumination over it. In the last mentions of Robinson's actions, we read indirectly that he had decided to take his own life instead of deciding in favor of either of the diametrically-opposed, obvious options—to put down the gun and walk away, or, kill the Prince. In facing Robinson with the two-volume-long task of deciding on the existential question at hand, siding with either the People or the Civilization:

James is thus far from endorsing a resigned conservative attitude of 'Let us preserve what we can of our great cultural heritage, even if it was paid for by the suffering of the anonymous millions': all individuals who stand for this heritage are fake, following an empty ritual; their finesse is a mask of vulgarity. The deadlock is thus real, there is no easy way out; Hyacinth Robinson's suicide, with which the book concludes, indicates an unsolvable antinomy: the impossibility of choosing between the rights of the dispossessed and high culture. More pertinently, what Hyacinth cannot bring together are the two sides of a parallax view—a feature that characterized James himself, with his 'power to see both sides of a question. Hyacinth also, to his destruction, can see each side of the question so well that the only action available to him is self-destruction, which is itself a symbolic statement, the only work of art available to him [1, p. 128].

3. Parallax Gaps and Symbolic Gesture of 'Politeness' in James' *The Wings of the Dove* and Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"

In Žižek's chapter on Henry James in *The Parallax View*, he also analyzed the 1902 novel, *The Wings of the Dove*, for the symbolic role that a bequest of money plays in the plot as a partial, sublime object: "We all know the elementary form of politeness, that of the empty symbolic gesture, a gesture—an offer—which is meant to be rejected" [1, p. 130]. The bequest of money from one character to another starts in motion a chain of events that leave its protagonists with the sentiment that things will never again be as they once were by its final lines. The novel revolves around a young English couple, Kate Croy and Merton Densher, who hatch a plot—thought up by Kate—for Densher to marry a wealthy socialite, Milly Theale, whose health begins to fail once she arrives from America to stay at Kate and her Aunt Maud's home in London. While the young couple are quite poor, Kate knows that if Densher were to marry Milly, he would inherit her fortune once she dies, allowing the young couple to afford their own marriage. Milly had already met Densher once, and had been in love with him, but hadn't told him; and, as Densher feared, Milly learns of Kate's plan from a mutual friend in their social circle. As Žižek notes, the existential question being cycled around unfolds through Milly's subsequent actions:

> The one on trial here is Milly: upon learning of the plot, she reacts with a gesture of sacrifice, leaving her fortune to Densher. This utterly altruistic gesture is, of course, manipulative in a much more profound way than Kate's plot: Milly's aim is to ruin the link between Kate and Densher through her bequest of money to Densher. She freely assumes and stages her death itself as a self-obliterating sacrifice which, together with the bequest, should enable Kate and Densher to live happily ever after… the best way of ruining any prospect of happiness for them [1, p. 130].

Milly succeeds in her retaliation, as Densher refuses either accept the money she left to him or to marry Kate if she accepts the money; further, he even offers to part with Kate and let *her* accept the money, signaling his rejection to participate in the existential debate once the symbolism of the money itself had transmogrified into a less palatable, guilt-inducing shape. How each character reacts to the news of the plot—is it *right* or *wrong* to succeed in or gain

something significant through deception—forms the existential dialogue in discussion: "The novel's moments of decision occur when un-wanted knowledge (even knowledge about knowledge) is imposed on people—how will this knowledge affect their acts?" [1, p. 130]. As Milly learns of Kate's plan, knowledge of their deception inspires Milly to fully participate in it and bequeath the money to Densher. Knowing Densher, Milly compromises the young couple's plan to marry using the money, as if neither of them would be affected by the guilt or shame of coming into it in such a greedy way. Densher, now feeling persecuted by the object of money (as representative of his own actions), feels he cannot accept it after Milly's death, and it drives the couple apart. In this way, Milly's death marks the transformative moment that the money changes its status from an object associated with Milly to an object associated with the idea of the guilt and shame induced by the deceptive plot.

Salinger, another writer who straddled key shifts in literary periods like James, also posed the dilemma of *the People* versus *the Civilization* (the Symbolic Order) throughout most of his writing, among other related existential binaries. The key difference, however, is that, in James' example, Hyacinth Robinson cannot rationalize the competing ideologies being presented to him, and in Salinger's, Seymour Glass stands opposed to any ideology being presented as the preferred order of operations for society (society is gluttonous and greedy, as we, the participants, are perpetually in pursuit of pleasure). In his 1948 *New Yorker* story, Seymour Glass is 'losing control' of his orientation within his reality precisely *because* he feels that he can *see* what's *right* and what's *wrong,* and others have become incapable of this in their existences. Unlike Robinson, who's caught within it, Seymour's perspective stands diametrically opposed to the symbolic network; and once the impassible cycle reaches a breaking point, the character kills himself, no longer able to participate within it.

The story's later elevator exchange is the only instance where we see any sign of (slight) aggression in Seymour, who's apparently been playing the piano in the Ocean room of the resort for a day or two, and who had been great company for at least two of the children staying there. In the elevator, once back among other adults, he doesn't behave like a neurotic maniac *per se*, but he also doesn't behave like the perfect holiday gentleman towards women; instead, he's somewhere in between. Throughout the story, symbolically, Seymour is caught in between the different operational thinking of an adult's versus a child's mind; in between the men who returned from war versus those who died or never went to fight at all; and in between those who returned mentally fit versus those that had to be carried away as literal or figurative 'basket cases', a term for soldiers who had lost all their limbs and had to be carried off the fields in baskets instead of stretchers. Diegetically, Seymour is in between floors, in between the walls of a box—a two-by-two-foot steel box, reminiscent of being awake in a coffin—he's in between the beach and his hotel room, and in between states of dress—with his sandy beach feet exposed. Dialogically, Seymour is the only male character to have his *own* voice in the story; and indeed, as Muriel confirmed for us, he doesn't sound like he's a maniac—his voice instead stands in contrast to the female voices that constitute the world of the plot.

Seymour, either through his characterization or his thoughts and actions, remains separated from the other characters across a parallax gap of interpretation for the entire story. Apart from his wife's parents' perspectives on his actions, Muriel herself confirms that, even if jokingly, Seymour saw her as being on the *wrong* side of things spiritually: "'He calls me Miss Spiritual Tramp of 1948,' the girl said, and giggled" [4, p. 7]. Even in earlier interactions with Sybil, before he delivers his parable about the fabled bananafish—a story cloaked in the fantasy of truth—Seymour purposefully miss-sees and misrepresents objects to playfully and plainly test whether Sybil will participate in the fantasy and agree with him, or stick to her own parallax

view on the objects he references, thereby restoring the reality of truth to them—something comforting to him:

That's a fine bathing suit you have on. If there's one thing I like, it's a blue bathing suit." Sybil stared at him, then looked down at her protruding stomach. "This is a yellow," she said. "This is a yellow." "It is? Come a little closer." Sybil took a step forward. "You're absolutely right. What a fool I am" [4, p. 17].

Fools see yellow as blue. Inching closer and closing to bridge the gap on the parallax view opened by swimsuit/color, once Sybil asks Seymour where he's from and she answers that she, too, is from the same place—in its exact phrasing—she begins to close a parallax gap between the two:

"Whirly Wood, Connecticut," said the young man. "Is that anywhere near Whirly Wood, Connecticut, by any chance?" Sybil looked at him. "That's where I live," she said impatiently. "I live in Whirly Wood, Connecticut." … "You have no idea how clear that makes everything," the young man said… [4, p. 20].

In phrasing it just as she did, she and Seymour essentially are seeing the same thing within language—and she has no idea how clear and glad it makes the view for him now. When Sybil brings up her jealousy to Seymour, about how she had seen him sitting with the younger girl while he was playing piano, he explains to her that some situations require polite gestures. At the moment, if a young girl were to come to sit down by him, Seymour would probably not push for his desire to have her leave out of his *politeness*—what's expected of his behavior socially in this situation, especially as an adult; likewise, the girl, as a child, would not realize this action as impolite or awkward—to sit down next to a friendly-looking stranger playing music at the hotel resort:

"And Sharon Lipschutz came over and sat down next to me. I couldn't push her off, could I?' 'Yes.' 'Oh no, I couldn't do that… I'll tell you what I did do, though.' 'What?' 'I pretended she was you. Sybil stooped immediately and began to dig in the sand" [4, p. 18].

Children are thus further removed, Seymour found in this case, from these connotative symbolic layers to our reality. When Seymour tried to assure Sybil's feelings, he invited Sybil to the opportunity for a *méconnaissance* on the object of the little girl—to reinterpret the reality, the past, as if it had happened in some better way: if it wasn't really Sybil sitting with him, then what was the purpose of saying he 'saw' Sharon as her? Sybil doesn't return a response, and changes to another task, likely aware that Seymour was exaggerating the truth but confused to press it further. Thus, in some way, she likely wasn't fully across this parallax gap of understanding, but only in some momentarily-fantasied interpretation of it. However, as their conversation progresses, we find that Sybil, too, is caught in the dilemma of Seymour's earlier statement when her thoughts immediately interrupt, and follow, a thought about something unrelated; almost as if this enabled her to ask the next question like it was similar to the previous: "Do you like olives? … Do you like Sharon Lipschutz?" [4, p. 21].

Seymour and Sybil's interaction demonstrates the meaning of the symbolic gesture, in that it's meant to function entirely on its surface-value, and it's constructed in fantasy. Initially, the thought may be more palatable to Sybil that she's been written into the past—transposed onto the object-image of the little girl sitting with him on the bench. The more Sybil thinks of it passively before bringing it up once more, the more she will realize that looking too closely at the symbolic gesture transforms it, and it can take the shape of a myth or a lie in its very nature. Enforcing a disconnection from reality, the symbolic gesture here presents a direct conflation between fantasy and reality—what really happened and what did not; life as it actually happened. To acknowledge its truth can be awkward or uncomfortable, even quite painful, and this thus enables the persistence of the fantasy, of the false nature of its reality—

its connotation as *politeness*. Recall the example of 'sadness' and how culturally-shared images are constituted on individual and symbolic levels. Here, Sybil reveals that she is debating the lie of the gesture when she asks him if he likes Sharon (better than her); at this moment, she recognizes one version of the story where she is in the place of the girl-object (in fantasy) and another where it is instead Sharon (in reality), and she is—in a subliminal sense—asking which he prefers.

In a way of seeing, Seymour answers that he prefers reality as it were when he responds in Sharon's favor: "She's never mean or unkind. That's why I like her so much" [4, p. 22]. The heavy implication in his specificity about why he likes Sharon is actually, likely, veiled criticism of Sybil instead: he likes Sharon precisely because she is a little girl who is behaving truly politely, and not committing a very specific type of unkind or violent act on a helpless, grumpy, little bulldog when no one is looking (*unlike whom?* the question begs). Continuing a message of preferring kindness in the world, Seymour cautions Sybil about the ill-fated bananafish, a parable explaining the overindulged human impulse towards greed and gluttony and its effects on society—the people cultivated and consumed by the civilization. The bananafish thus becomes the sublime, monstrous object representative of greedy people, overindulgent in their desires and fantasies:

"That's understandable. Their habits are very peculiar." He kept pushing the float. The water was not quite up to his chest. "They lead a very tragic life," he said. "You know what they do, Sybil?" … "Well, they swim into a hole where there's a lot of bananas. They're very ordinary-looking fish when they swim in. But once they get in, they behave like pigs. Why, I've known some bananafish to swim into a banana hole and eat as many as seventy-eight bananas." He edged the float and its passenger a foot closer to the horizon. "Naturally, after that, they're so fat they can't get out of the hole again. Can't fit through the door" [4, p. 22-3].

Behaviors that reveal an over-greediness and overindulgence for any particular motivation are transferable onto the bananafish sublime object image. Through the ability to read mimetically, experientially into an existential question such as the one Seymour embodies and presents in his parable, readers can arrive at radically divergent conclusions on the conversations with Sybil, the bananafish parable, the elevator confrontation, and the character's suicide. For example, with a pure Freudian reading of the story, a reader can arrive at the sexual message within it: our worst fears can be confirmed in reading Seymour as an army vet indulging in a greedy moment, preparing a four-to-six-year-old girl with a suggestive but child-friendly explanation: "A bananafish," he said, and undid the belt of his robe. He took off the robe" [4, p. 19]. After a wave passes over them and she sees one bananafish with six bananas in its mouth, one might read an implication that he exposed himself to Sybil, who might be looking down onto blurred-watery perspective of five little toes next to an erect penis:

"My God, no!" said the young man. "Did he have any bananas in his mouth?" "Yes," said Sybil. "Six." … The young man suddenly picked up one of Sybil's wet feet, which were drooping over the end of the float, and kissed the arch [4, p. 24].

The bananafish swim down into a hole, where their objective is to consume; they become permanently disfigured or marked by their greed, which paints them in a deathly state—in perpetual decline through their fatness:

"What happens to who?" "The bananafish." "Oh, you mean after they eat so many bananas they can't get out of the banana hole?" "Yes," said Sybil. "Well, I hate to tell you, Sybil. They die." "Why?" asked Sybil. "Well, they get banana fever. It's a terrible disease" [4, p. 23].

Similarly, analyses of Seymour and the symbol of the feet vis-a-vis the bananafish in the story have also returned Christian comparisons to Jesus from the *Bible*; and this reading is perhaps valid, if one were seeking to interpret Seymour as the *Angry Jesus* concerned with darker parables of gluttony and corruption among men (as fish). Among other comparisons are Sybil Carpenter's name, the kissing of the feet, the symbol of the fish, and baptism in the story. At the same time, this Jesus-as-Antihero interpretation only shows how Christian messages actually fall apart when we examine them too closely in the story—through his suicide, Seymour inverts his Christian interpretation and actually thwarts his biblical, prophetic 'messages,' through his self-destruction. In spite of the bananafish parable, Seymour's suicide is much less of a message of dying or being killed for others' greed and gluttony and much more of a Nietzschean *actually, life is pointless and I refuse to participate*.

Whether we interpret the plot for signs that Seymour is underpinning his parable with messages of sexual deviance or Christian spiritual symbolism, it is clear that Seymour cannot, himself, bridge the parallax gaps that emerge in his reality. He cannot rationalize the woman's statement of staring at his feet as *the truth*, and further, he cannot endure his paranoiac projections as to what she is staring at *on* his feet. He tells his wife that he feels marked by a tattoo, as well, so he clearly feels that there is something on him *to judge* and stare at. Whatever has marked him, he feels affected by it to such an extent that he feels unbearably persecuted by it—much how the feeling of *jouissance* can manifest paranoia.

4. Interpreting Suicide as Symbolism in Salinger's "A Perfect Day for Bananafish"

Seymour's experiences compel us to examine the essence of reality itself: What do we genuinely perceive, and in what ways do our interpretations influence our understanding of the world—a very similar message to the effect of imposed knowledge in James' *The Wings of the Dove*. As we grapple with the intricacies of human behavior, both on an individual level and within social groups, it becomes evident that our perceptions may not accurately mirror reality. Through Seymour's interactions, we're prompted to question the nature of truth, reminiscent of the thematic explorations found in James' novels, particularly the existential tension between the individual and societal constructs: the psyche versus the symbolic order. The notion of behavior—both in personal conduct and in group dynamics—raises significant philosophical questions concerning the nature of reality. It invites us to reflect on the discrepancies between perception and truth: is what we observe truly what it appears to be? Who possesses the authority to determine the validity of these interpretations? Such considerations emphasize that our perceptions may often misrepresent reality, leading us to navigate a symbolic network that allows fantasy to infiltrate reality.

Plainly, the existential questions embodied in Seymour are that of presenting a false symbolic gesture of politeness, in fantasy, versus opting for a 'pure-seeing' of reality, and what is morally tolerable in pursuing pleasure and what is not. Returning to the confrontational elevator scene that Kim et al. first alluded to in rereading for *clues*—Seymour at his most neurotic—the repetitious cycle reaches a new level of excitation when Seymour becomes so agitated by the woman's staring that he confronts her in response. Instead, consider the passage for the symbolism of existential questions in dialogue, present in the ontological forms of the characters:

"I see you're looking at my feet," he said to her when the car was in motion. "I beg your pardon?" said the woman. "I said I see you're looking at my feet." "I beg your pardon. I happened to be looking at the floor," said the woman, and faced the doors of the car. "If you want to look at my feet, say so," said the

young man. "But don't be a God-damned sneak about it." "Let me out here, please," the woman said quickly to the girl operating the car. The car doors opened and the woman got out without looking back. "I have two normal feet and I can't see the slightest God-damned reason why anybody should stare at them," said the young man [4, p. 25-6].

In the elevator, there's a repetitive oscillation between the two positions of the 'object' (foot or floor) being looked at, between what constitutes truth or a lie between two people, between who is the one telling the truth and who is the one lying, between which one of them is behaving acceptably socially and who is not, between which one of them walks out of the two-by-two foot steel box at end the conversation and who stays within it; and finally, what constitutes the perception of 'normal' between Seymour's statement versus his paranoiac projection onto the motivations of those who stare at (objects on/of) him.

It's through the death drive at work through Seymour's inability to regulate *jouissance*—the excess of excitation—to the level that paranoia then manifests as feelings of persecution that have become aligned with something external to him. In this case, it's the idea that someone, who is staring at his feet but lying about it, has 'sneaky,' deceptive intentions to uncover some type of information about him, or make some kind of judgment, based on whatever it is they've 'seen' on his feet. Seymour can't see the reason to stare—the information to be uncovered—and it exacerbates (*jouissance*) his paranoia to the point where he breaks and impulsively confronts this 'sneak' about it. In the elevator, the object is Seymour's feet, or a look, but earlier, it's a permanent scar that's not actually there: "'He says he doesn't want a lot of fools looking at his tattoo.' 'He doesn't have any tattoo!'" [4, p. 14]. In this tacit comment to her mother, Muriel's perception reveals another disconnection—a gap of miss-seeing—between her understanding of her husband's paranoiac thoughts versus Seymour's actual paranoid projections; the clear mark of a tattoo becomes (or always was) the unmarked skin of a foot and between the two stands yet another parallax gap in readers' interpretations as to these symbols. In the elevator, someone has 'seen' his tattoo, which is now the plain foot. In this comment, we also learn Seymour feels that everybody is looking at his tattoo—precisely because he has been looking at this invisible mark so much, and now he feels others are intensely drawn to it on him, too.

Introspectively, Seymour's perspective on staring differs from that of the other woman—and from the female elevator operator who remains silent—but only because she insists she's looking at something else entirely—the floor; she's deliberately misconstruing reality, and Seymour is immediately confrontational at any implication that he should 'see' things as she does. In confronting the woman, Seymour, who'd been perpetually in states of in-betweenness throughout the story, couldn't tolerate the possibility of misconstruance or misinterpretation any longer. The feeling in him had swelled to a bursting point, and in confronting her, he could confront what she stood for and figuratively kill the 'lie,' which would eliminate its position in opposition to the truth at this critical impasse. Truth in this sense is the reality as it really happened, without embellishment or diversion. In doing so, Seymour answers Hyacinth's earlier call to action: "In God's name, why don't we do something?" [8, p. 319].

Seymour's existential dilemma further recalls a scene from Gustave Flaubert's seminal 1856-7 novel, *Madame Bovary: Provincial Manners*, another version of a similar attempt to frame the plot around the *People* versus the *Civilization*:

"One's duty is to feel what is great, cherish the beautiful, and not accept all the conventions of society with the ignominy that it imposes upon us." "Yet—yet—" objected Madame Bovary. "No, no! Why cry out against the passions? Are they not the one beautiful thing on the earth, the source of heroism,

of enthusiasm, of poetry, music, the arts, of everything, in a word?" "But one must," said Emma, "to some extent bow to the opinion of the world and accept its moral code' [9, p. 24].

Here, Rodolphe equates the effects of the symbolic network upon us as ignominy—similar to Seymour's sentiment that it generates an illness, 'banana fever.' At the same time, Emma reminds her lecherous boyfriend that we must do what is *right* and live (seek pleasure) responsibly after he rejects the limitations that morality imposes on the idea that we should be able to enjoy whatever we want; we can read an implication of excess—a *jouissance* operative through fantasy within the symbolic network here, too. Returning to the elevator, Seymour felt reality conflating with fantasy when he observed a positional switch of mortality in the symbolic network, both absent and present in two places at once: was it the woman who was *wrong* for staring at his feet—because she is staring at his tattoo, what's not 'normal' on him—or was it Seymour, for publicly chastising her? In one sense, they're both wrong—both behaviors are perceived as rude; at the same time, it is the woman who is *right*, as the polite gesture commands both parties to ignore the ugly kernel of truth in the real moment: staring at someone's feet would be rude, *wrong*—but the truth of whether she looked at—the feet or the floor—is what consumed by the parallax gap of the symbolic polite gesture. Through *méconnaissance*—and misconstruance, and in a direct confrontation in the gap between fantasy and reality—the connotations of the symbolic gesture win out. Reality, and the importance it holds in his perceptions, is sacrificed to politeness, in this case, and Seymour can't take it anymore.

Echoing the very impulse of drive itself, to escape a cycle thus spurring it on, *méconnaissance* couldn't progress any further in the elevator dialogue: both the foot and the floor—Seymour and the woman—stand at opposite ends of a parallax view on the question of who is right or wrong, acted out symbolically through the gesture of looking at someone's feet. The dialogue ends abruptly when the woman, representing the symbolic gesture—intentional misconstruance and its prevalence in language and culture (in the symbolic order that structures our reality)—asks "Let me out here, please," after which she exited through the doors "without looking back" [4, p. 26]. The fact that intentional misconstruance, as a symbolic gesture in ontological form, leaves the elevator box permanently indicates its persistence beyond the box itself, beyond the temporary void for the dialogue. As intentional misconstruance emerged from the void, fully operational within the symbolic network, the ugliness that the reality of truth can hold was left within it; Seymour, left within the void of the elevator box, immediately retreated to the void of his hotel room (another box) thereafter. The woman exits first, more powerfully, because the symbolic gesture of politeness is often simply more palatable in culture; something Seymour was calling into contention vis-a-vis his parable on greed and its deathly consumption of humanity.

If someone is staring at your feet in an elevator, as a body part that's not particularly inappropriate, the symbolic gesture of politeness is to carry on as if nothing is happening; and similarly, the polite gesture is not to stare. The fact Seymour insists on his reality as the more correct truth automatically implicates the woman as a liar through her different perception. Thus, in aligning the symbolic gesture with the notion of a lie, and being unable to then kill said lie, Seymour's paranoiac feelings of persecution by it swelled to a new height, with *jouissance* spinning the death drive out of control. When reality and fantasy had reached a breaking point—when he didn't agree with the versions of 'reality' and its expectations being presented to him in the elevator—his next action was to kill himself, to avoid persecution by paranoid feelings of *wrongness* amidst his inability to orient himself in the symbolic network:

He glanced at the girl lying asleep on one of the twin beds. Then he went over to one of the pieces of luggage, opened it, and from under a pile of shorts and undershirts he took out an Ortgies caliber 7.65 automatic. He released the magazine, looked at it, then reinserted it. He cocked the piece. Then he went over and sat down on the unoccupied twin bed, looked at the girl, aimed the pistol, and fired a bullet through his right temple [4, p. 26].

Like the symbolic bananafish—"[t]hey get banana fever. It's a terrible disease"—the once ordinary fish are now too fat to save themselves after having eaten too many bananas—Seymour and the woman were caught up in the question as to who was behaving like the pig in the elevator (and according to whom and why; and which interpretation of reality was more correct) [4, p. 23]. To escape the repetitious cycle, disrupt it, unable to bridge the parallax gaps arising out of the symbolic network any longer, the character has to end his existence within the reality in which it operates. Within the work of fiction, Seymour—as one answer to the existential question—is thus returned to the narrative void. While Robinson could not turn the gun on the Prince because he could not decide (who was *right* or *wrong*), Seymour chose to turn the gun on himself because felt that actions he believed to be morally *wrong,* in whole or part, were being construed as symbolically *right*, or tolerable, thereby enacting a type of rewriting of the culturally-shared moral conceptions of social behaviors. Think now to the societal practices of preparing men for war through propaganda: violence is symbolically rewritten as valor. Seymour perceives that the overindulgences in structured fantasy-as-reality have taken over, and within the world of the plot, he sees no further existence for himself.

This cycle of Seymour reappearing as an existential question in ontological form is only more evident in a cross-reading of Salinger's full canon, as he reappears in younger forms in several stories, caught in similar states of in-betweenness. In "A Perfect Day for Bananafish," Seymour's existential representation had simply reached an unbearable level of *jouissance*—a pain of over-consumption, of *over*-seeing—in the repetitive cycle, that peaked and thus revealed itself through his paranoiac outburst in the elevator. His tires, to use another comparison, had simply tread too many miles and lost too much air, unable to support the car in motion any longer "Sybil prodded the rubber float that the young man sometimes used as a head-rest. 'It needs air,' she said. 'You're right. It needs more air than I'm willing to admit'" [4, p. 17]. As opposed to an outright depiction of a mentally ill character—that is to say, the story shows a *sick* man—Seymour is depicted more as struggling with an impassible pain anchored into his experience of reality; he can't rationalize or understand why fantasy is more preferable and prevalent in some cases—more palatable. Suddenly, an interpretation of Sybil's 'see more' can shift from the literal and onto the past: in seeing whatever has left a tattoo on him, he's seen more and too much of it; he's seen the fish-men trapped in the banana hole of ideology, rooting around, behaving like pigs. He found himself unable to rationalize and agree with the perspectives of reality being presented to him, conflating them in fantasy; even the smallest examples of greedy interactions—such as the woman's behavior in the elevator—became, finally, intolerable.

5. CONCLUSION

Fictional characters, as authors' creative manifestations, cannot undergo repetition compulsion on the same psychical level as authors can, dismissing Peter Brooks' idea that texts are representations of the author's psychical apparatus—something akin to the Freudian id, ego, and superego interacting. The character, as with James' case of Hyacinth Robinson, undergoes symbolic repetition compulsion around the ontological impasse in the existential

question(s) embodied; Robinson is aware of the repetitious and persecutory nature of his ruminating over a decision to assassinate the Prince in *Casamassima*, but he is not aware why he [was written to be] is so hung up the decision. James, however, as the author, is aware of both Robinson's rumination and 'traumatic' impasse as well as his own in why he has written out his rumination; he is aware of the symbolic order of (our shared) reality, or his existence. The Author is conscious and has, thus, a consciousness that his representative characterizations lack; as such, the pursuit of psychoanalytic rationalizations for characters like Hyacinth Robinson or Seymour Glass inevitably pushes into 'their conscious' in looking further into the author's lived experiences for comparative analyses. The argument that characters like J.D. Salinger's Seymour Glass are simply the result of their lived experiences of mental illnesses overlooks the depth of symbolic elements present in the story. These significant omissions should be acknowledged and discussed in further psychoanalytic literary scholarship.

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