**Quantifying Pathologies as Patterns and Preservation**

1. **The Premise: Y-BOC Scale**
   1. Throughout much of the literature that has been traversed in this semester, many pieces have been driven by a singular obsession, a fixation upon an object, an ideal, a memory. These obsessions are unique to each individual, but also serve as a common thread throughout, acting as an inescapable force, a representation of human fragility, and as a tenuous form of preservation.
   2. This experimental form will try to apply the Yale-Brown Obsessive Compulsive Scale (<http://www.stlocd.org/handouts/YBOC-Symptom-Checklist.pdf>) to some of the obsessions in these literary pieces and develop patterns, establish a spectrum, and draw conclusions. This by no means attempts to “diagnose” the characters, instead using the scale as a tool to organize the behaviors of the characters. Luckily, the scale is easily separable into “obsessive” and “compulsive” and this will focus primarily on the “obsessive.” The only character of the three (Trina, Charlie Citrine, and Gutman) who develops real compulsions is Trina.
   3. Definitions from Y-BOC:
      1. OBSESSIONS are unwelcome and distressing ideas, thoughts, images, or impulses that repeatedly enter your mind. They may seem to occur against your will. They may be repugnant to you, you may recognize them as senseless, and they may not fit your personality.
      2. COMPULSIONS, on the other hand, are behaviors or acts that you feel driven to perform although you may recognize them as senseless or excessive. At times, you may try to resist doing them but this may prove difficult. You may experience anxiety that does not diminish until the behavior is completed.
   4. The Y-BOC is also split into six areas that deal with obsessions:
      1. Time occupied by obsessive thoughts
      2. Interference due to obsessive thoughts
      3. Distress associated with obsessive thoughts
      4. Resistance against obsessions
      5. Degree control over obsessive thoughts
      6. Insight into obsessions
   5. Ultimately, the Y-BOC will be used as a marker to easily refer to and categorize the obsessive behaviors of Trina Sieppe in *McTeague,* Casper Gutman in *The Maltese Falcon*, and Charlie Citrine in *Humboldt’s Gift*.
2. **Trina in *McTeague***
   1. The patterns of obsession in *McTeague* are not difficult to identify at all. McTeague continually falls back upon his steam beer and concertina; Maria her story about her family’s gold, even Old Grannis and his book binder. However, the development of obsession is most evident in Trina.
      1. From the very beginnings of her marriage to McTeague, Trina has already developed a fierce attachment to her pattern of life.
         1. “all her pretty ways, her clean, trim little habits, would be forgotten, since they would be thrown away upon her stupid, brutish husband” (146).
      2. The obsession begins in earnest, however, when she actually receives the grand sum of money by winning the lottery and she begins to express her emotional obsessiveness:
         1. “’Oh, you are the thick-wittedest man that I ever knew. Do you think we’re millionaires? Oh, to think of losing thirty-five dollars like that.’ Tears were in her eyes, tears of grief as well as of anger” (161). This is the beginning of the obsession’s interference in her normal actions.
      3. The most prominent example of her obsession’s interference is embodied in her meditations about and repulsion to her generosity to McTeague.
         1. “If not thirty-five dollars, then at least fifteen or sixteen, her share of it. But a feeling of reluctance, a sudden revolt against this intended generosity, arose in her” (164).
         2. This is also an example of almost-resistance. Trina’s resistance of her impulses have already been quickly diminished at this point, although she is well aware of her miser-like behavior: “’I guess I am [miserly], but I can’t help it, and it’s a good fault” (197).
         3. She ends up breaking those precious “pretty ways, her clean trim little habits” in her pursuit of hoarding, saving: “Trina’s stinginess had increased to such an extent that it had gone beyond the mere hoarding of money. She grudged even the food that she and McTeague ate, and even brought away half loaves of bread, lumps of sugar, and fruit form the car conductors’ coffee joint” (233).
      4. So far, Trina has already fulfilled four of the six sections of the Y-BOC. Trina’s most extreme form obsession often takes place in distress associated with her obsessions.
         1. After basically forcing McTeague and herself to move out of their home in the Parlors (because she refuses to admit she has the money to continue living there), she “sob[s] herself to sleep at the thought of her past happiness and her present wretchedness,” which is, of course, self-inflicted (216).
         2. And when she finds her money has been pilfered by McTeague (although not all of her money, yet), she has a physical breakdown: “She dug her nails into her scalp, and clutching the heavy coils of her thick black hair, tore it again and again. She struck her forehead with her clenched fists. Her little body shook from head to foot with the violence of her sobbing” (274).
            1. The most striking indicator of her obsession’s total control over her life and her thoughts is her response when told her fingers must be amputated: “’My work!’ exclaimed Trina” (276).
      5. Trina scores a 15/20 of the Y-BOC in the obsessions alone.
3. **Charlie in *Humboldt’s Gift***
   1. Charlie Citrine is already in the throes of his obsession with Humboldt, which has truly begun before he even meets Humboldt. The entire novel is driven by Charlie’s meditations upon Humboldt, that almost every moment of the piece is permeated by Humboldt’s post-humus presence, a “What would Humboldt have said to this?” at every turn (3).
   2. The readers’ introduction to Humboldt is highly ordered and deeply nuanced—a clear sign of deep meditation beforehand.
      1. “What else can result from the capitalization of such nouns? Myself, I’ve always held the number of sacred words down. In my opinion Humboldt had too long a list of them—Poetry, Beauty, Love, Waste Land, Alienation, Politics, History of the Unconscious” (6).
         1. There’s something very intimate about this description that screams volumes about the thought that Charlie has put into looking back upon the person Humboldt was and the time he has spent thinking about Humboldt.
      2. Charlie also does Humboldt’s bidding—see the Princeton Plan (126).
      3. Like Trina, Charlie is somewhat aware of his own obsession, but seems unwilling or unable to take action against it.
         1. “I’ve reached an age at which you can see your neurotic impulses advancing on you. There’s not much that I can do when the dire need of help comes over me. I stand at the edge of a psychic pond and I know that if crumbs are thrown in, my carp will come swimming up” (50).
      4. The obsession with the past considerably intersects itself into Charlie’s other pressing (financial) matters. “How to prevent the leprosy of souls. Somehow it appeared to be up to me. I meditated like anything. I followed Humboldt in my mind. He was smoking on the train. I saw him passing quick and manic” (137).
      5. In terms of resistance, we know Charlie is aware of his apparent obsession because many others make a point of it—most notably, Renata: “What you do [. . .] is invent relationships with the dead you never had when they were living. You create connections they wouldn’t allow, or you weren’t capable of. I heard you say once that death was good for some people. You probably meant that you got something out of it” (315). He has little resistance to these probing thoughts and has little control over them as well.
      6. Beyond the generally cumbersome presence of Humboldt in Charlie’s narration, the scene of Humboldt walking down the street with a pretzel stick is the most piercing image that continues to insert itself into Charlie’s mind.
         1. “The mention of zwieback brought back to me, also, the pretzel he was chewing on the curb on that hot day. On that day I made a poor showing. I should have gone up to him. I should have taken his hand. I should have kissed his face” (346).
         2. This scene recurs on many occasions, being conjured up my many different triggers. In this instance, his obsession is not perhaps with the person that is Humboldt, but on the actions he did not take.
   3. Charlie scores a 11/20 of the Y-BOC in the obsessions alone.
4. **Gutman in *The Maltese Falcon***
   1. Gutman’s obsession with the physical object that is the Maltese Falcon seems the most straight-forward, but is probably the most subtle in-text. This obsession is defined by the lengths to which he is willing to go to attain his end goal.
   2. First and foremost, Gutman, like the others, spends an inordinate amount of time meditating upon the object of his obsession. He knows this long-winded (and hard-to-believe) history of the falcon by heart and takes it as irrefutable: “These are facts, historical facts, not schoolbook history, not Mr. Wells’s history, but history nevertheless” (124).
   3. Gutman’s obsessions are quite well-veiled. The outbursts are intense but far in between; tiny moments (“The fat man set the bottle on the table with a bang. ‘But you said you [knew where the falcon was],’ he protested” (128).) There are a number of surprising things that Gutman is also willing to commit to get at this bird.
      1. Poisoning Charlie: “He shook his head again and took an uncertain step forward. He laughed thickly and muttered: ‘God damn you.’” (130).
      2. Using his daughter as a red herring: “’That daughter of yours has a nice belly,’ [Sam] said, ‘too nice to be scratched up with pins.’ [. . .] ‘Yes, sir, that was a shame, but you must admit that it served its purpose’” (173).
      3. Giving up Wilmer as a fall-guy: “’I feel towards Wilmer just exactly as if he were my own son. I really do. But if I even for a moment thought of doing what you propose, what in the world do you think would keep Wilmer from telling the police every last detail?’ [. . .] The fat man sighed and made a wry face and replied, ‘You can have him.’” (1178, 186).
   4. Gutman, unlike Trina and Charlie, is able to mask his obsession in casual control.
      1. Gutman is never the one to initiate talk about the falcon. “’Let’s talk about the bird,’ Spade said” is how they come to speak about it almost every time (123).
      2. From the beginning, Gutman is painted as somewhat suave, well-mannered (as well as ruthless). Therefore, the image of him “fumbling [. . .] Sweat glistened on his round cheeks. His fingers twitched” when faced with the actual (supposed) bird seems jarring. This is a moment of reality, a second where Gutman’s veiled obsessions shine through.
   5. The interfering nature of his obsession is most apparent when he decides it may be worth it to drop everything and go to Turkey at the drop of a hat to find this bird. By any sane logic, there must be a certain point where the sunk cost no longer weighs on the hunt, especially as “’For seventeen years [he has] wanted that little item and have been trying to get it. If [he] must spend another year on the quest—well, sir—that will be an additional expenditure in time of only’—his lips moved silently as he calculated—‘five and fifteen-seventeenths per cent’” (203).
      1. Gutman has no resistance to his thoughts. He thinks it a noble cause and therefore sees no need to resist the obsession.
   6. Gutman scores also an 11/20 on the Y-BOC in the obsessions alone.
5. **Pattern-reading**
   1. The different patterns are generally comparable to intensity and duration. Gutman has the duration of the obsession locked up, and Charlie has the moments of intensity in his thoughts about Humboldt. Trina is the most interesting in pattern-reading, because as she develops throughout the novel, she develops intensity as duration continues to elongate.
   2. Also interesting, both Trina and Gutman are “destroyed” in the most physical way at the end of their obsession. It remains to be seen whether Charlie truly releases his obsession with Humboldt (that is, not to say that he completely wipes Humboldt from his mind, but rather is no longer fixated).
6. **Pathologies as preservation**
   1. Trina’s preservation is a desperate attempt to retain normalcy, her habits, masking her fragility and fear. Her interactions with McTeague have fundamentally changed her course of life, not just because McTeague is brutish, but because it constitutes a certain loss of self. As she becomes more and more detached from the life she knew before McTeague, the more fiercely she holds onto the gold, the money, her physical ability to save and savor something.
   2. Charlie’s preservation is two-fold. It is both in Charlie’s preservation of Humboldt as a greater person than the specter he sees on the street right before his death, and also in Charlie’s need to save himself by doing so. Charlie is seeking answers to his current decline in the past of Humboldt, a mentor and (mostly) a huge figure in his life. In a way, he is getting something out of it, as Renata accuses him of doing. Saul Bellow also projects this obsession as far more positive than Frank Norris does Trina’s—Charlie’s obsession results in some form of release and a noble gesture, whereas Trina’s obsession leads to her complete disregard for her own safety.
   3. Gutman’s preservation is the least obvious. He’s protecting his purpose. In a way, Gutman’s preservation is an extreme of the sunk-cost-problem. Gutman has built an entire network dedicated to tracking down this bird and has invested years of his life into this endeavor. At this point, find this Maltese Falcon is almost a part of his identity. Quitting at this point is a waste, although there is no way to get back the years he’s already used in the search. The payoff of the bird has something to do with the money, for sure, but the greater payoff deals with Gutman’s self-constructed identity surrounding this object.
7. **Conclusions**