

## Exploring the Attributes of Opposing Characters in John Fowles's *the Collector*

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**Abstract.** *"The Collector" has ignited an abundant searches and researches and has enlightened the literary critics to unfathomed it from different view point. Keeping a birds eye on the turns and twists generated by the predicament and enlivened by the characters, "The Collector" with its unique characterization, paints in Toto the psycho dynamics of the minds steering the plot of the fiction. The duo characters; Clegg and Miranda, besides being independent individuals, carved out a fine niche to critically analyse the gender, sexuality and body in all their rainbow colors. Product of the different classes and distinct background, Fredrick and Miranda have been featured to be the mouthpiece of the time succumbing to their destined slots of social hierarchy. The paper titled "Exploring the attributes of opposing characters" in John Fowles "The Collector. It intends to highlight what "few" are and the "many" are not. While Fredrick Clegg is an outcast, lonely frozen and neurotic character whose attraction for Miranda changes to obsession. An amateur Photographer and an Entomologist ends up becoming human collector and lastly a psycho killer. With his butterfly collection, chloroform pad and lastly to a Psycho killer. With his butterfly collection, chloroform pad he very well illustrates "The Collector Mentality". On the contrary, the Protagonist Miranda Grey, a 20 year old student is the emblem of creativity and vitality. She had the privilege growing up in the middle class. Of the two she is the repository of superior wisdom. Miranda when held captive in the cellar by Clegg becomes more patient, resistant and develop[s] a broader outlook on life. We see an evolution in her life. But on the part of Clegg there is not an iota of self introspection. We see an insane evolution in his character that from a Collector to a kidnapper and lastly to a killer. He is body cocooned in his own self and perceptions. Although Miranda is captive physically she is emotionally boundless contrary to Clegg who is physically free but emotionally boundless contrary to Clegg who is physically free but emotionally captive in his own ideas.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Binary Opposites, Psychotic, Duplicity, Elusive.*

John Fowles first novel, **"The Collector"** published in the year 1963 considered as a thriller novel can be read from two different viewpoints of the two main contrasting characters. It also involves principles of Power, Class and Control. The first viewpoint is that of the man himself (The Collector) Clegg Fredrick, a clerk by profession in a city hall and a part time passionate Etymologist who undergoes moral corruption because of the sudden wealth that he gains as a result of winning a lottery in the pools. In his initial days we are introduced to Clegg as a loner and outcast who limits himself within his mind and who secretly admires Miranda from his office window. But with his sudden acquired wealth he plans to execute his dream into reality and hence his first step of transformation to collect Miranda, to turning into a kidnapper and at the end to a merciless psychotic killer begins inevitably. As Fredrick puts it *"Power corrupts, a teacher I had always said. Money is Power[Fowles,Pg.27]."* With his new found fortune Clegg buys a Van which he often parks in the localities where Miranda visits and starts stalking her in the coffee houses or outside her college. He also buys a house in the outskirts of London with an ideal, isolated location where he plans to keep

Miranda captive and modifies the basement as sound proof so that no one could hear her scream. From the beginning the readers feel that Clegg turning into a Psychopath killer and a tragic ending is inevitable. He carefully plans the kidnapping in detail and commits the perfect crime such as him moving into a new hotel every night and booking out of it the next morning so that he couldn't be traced. He also buys a special incinerator in advance to burn all of Miranda's rubbish without leaving a clue. Once she is held captive in his dream house to taking all the precautions during the making of her cellar jail. And in his own words he tells *"I had a special plastic bag sewn in my mac pocket, in which I put some of the chloroform and CTC and the pad so it was soaked and fresh. I kept the flap down so the smell kept in, then in a second I could get it out when needed"* [Fowles, Pg. 23]. And after executing his plan he is happy and at the same calm and here we get an insight into the mind of this man which is far away from normal. The night when he kidnaps Miranda we get to see a glimpse of his psychotic mind wherein he says *"I can only say that evening I was very happy and it was more like I had done something very daring, like climbing Everest or doing something in enemy territory. My feelings were very happy because my intentions were of the best. It was she never understood. To sum up, that night was the best thing I ever did in my life (bar winning the pools in the first place"* [Fowles, Pg. 37]. Clegg considers Miranda as his Guest and not as a Victim. He feels he watches her and not stalk her. He feels 'collecting' Miranda is the only way where he will be able to make her know him and finally fall in love with him whereas he has the inability to understand that no one in her sound mind will be able to love her Captor in a claustrophobic atmosphere. Still he fails to understand that he is the Captor and Miranda the Captivator. Providing Miranda with the best of expensive dresses and her favourite foods and stuffs he feels he will receive her love and later describes her ungrateful even though he had done the best for her and no one would be able to do that which he had done for her. Here too, he fails to understand that he had curtailed the most desirable thing that she craves for and that is her **"FREEDOM"**. He thought it better to cut off Miranda from the outside world so that she will concentrate her thoughts more upon him. Clegg disliked having in depth discussion with Miranda but liked her watching when asleep. He also loved taking her naked photos after drugging her with chloroform pads to cleaning the necklace that he bought for her from the jewellery store citing he didn't like to think of the jewellery touching other women's skin. During Miranda's last days she suffers severely still Clegg doesn't call for any medical aid and makes her death even more heart wrenching. His inability to call for Doctor's aid is also justified by himself. Even after she is dead he in a very calm manner follows his everyday routine right from having his breakfast to taking a nap. And when he discovers Miranda's diary he gets to know the fact that she never had any feelings for him and he changes his plan of suicide and very carefully disposes off Miranda's body. By the end he turns from a Psychotic lover to a Psychopath killer who already starts eyeing his next victim. John Fowles depicts distorted class difference through the two conflicting identities and their multifaceted relationship. Fowles wrote the novel during the times when majority of people were gaining prosperity. And Power (in terms of wealth) was being attained by those who were unsuitable to handle it. The Upper Class again divided them into 1) Old Money: The ones who had inherited the aged old name, fame and status 2) New Money were the ones who had the sudden rise of wealth but was devoid of any class and status. Clegg Fredrick belonged in this class who had a sudden gain of wealth by winning a lottery. Miranda never considers Clegg of her own class. She believes she belongs to the group of "Few"- the educated, elite, creative and good. On the contrary Clegg belongs to the group of "Many" who are dull and ordinary. She sees Clegg's status of Power as a result of the New found Money and feels it as a *"horrid timid copycatting genteel in between class"* [Fowles, Pg. 172]. On the contrary when Clegg feels Miranda is all bright and bossy and laughing out on him then Miranda tells Clegg that she is trying to make him figure his "ignorant" side. She compares herself to the different characters from the novels of Jane Austen who think themselves as teachers but are the ones who need to be taught life lessons in reality. Fowles emphasizes his point of view through the irony of the characters. Also he describes Miranda as *"arrogant in her ideas, a prig [and] a liberal- humanist slob"* [Fowles, Pg. 152]. She is self righteous but at the same time she is also the one who follows a *"list of rules"* [Fowles, Pg. 152] to think by as given by her Mentor G.P. She herself here is the "Many" and G.P being the "Few". But Miranda tries to assume the authority to teach Clegg art appreciation but he never learns anything and only does things to please her wherein she mentions in her diary *"I drew him this morning. I wanted to get his*

face, to illustrate this. But it wasn't any good, and he wanted it. Said he would pay TWO HUNDRED guineas for it. He is mad. "Fowles, Pg.158] .Miranda feels she is always "above" him. However the environment between them is distorted because Clegg here is the owner of land and clothes and since he usurps Miranda's class in these respects, he technically controls the upper class status. Hence, there is no crystal clarity of who has the ultimate authority and therefore the environment is of a distorted system.

Clegg has a clear lack of sanity and doesn't have any sort of affectionate relationship. Brought up with little money and poor education in the working class, he is an introvert, socially inept and dull man who develops a platonic addiction to the beautiful, intelligent, elite Slate School Student Miranda. It's his insanity that he "collects" Miranda and keeps her captive. Miranda states *"I am one in row of specimens. It's when I try to flutter out of line that he hates me. I'm meant to be dead, pinned, always the same, always beautiful."* [Fowles, Pg.203]

Clegg views Miranda as an extension of his butterfly collection. He considers her as a part of his beautiful collection. Clegg expects her to be obedient and gets upset when she tries to exercise her free will. She knows what her worth in Clegg's view is and says. *"I know what I am to him. A butterfly he has always wanted to catch."* [Fowles, Pg.157] Clegg's descriptions of Miranda and their relationship show his delusional mentality. He is able to express smart himself or his feelings and often is nervous and doesn't like when Miranda does the talking. For instance, he says *"She was going to speak but I felt I had to stop her questions, I didn't know she was sharp. Not like normal people."* [Fowles, Pg.41] Clegg is unable to realise his loopholes and his prosperity is in conflict with his uneducated upbringing. He believes he can buy his way into the upper caste with his new found fortune and thereby kidnapping or "collecting" Miranda. Before the sudden wealth he could only dream of having Miranda but with the fortune he executes the plan of kidnapping her and we get a glimpse of his mental life through these statements: *"But forgetting's not something you do, it happens to you. Only it didn't happen to me."* [Fowles, Pg.13]. These shows Clegg's disconnect from human emotions and show his disturbed mindset throughout the story. Miranda's diary provides a complete different view of the events that Clegg mentions in his journal. Miranda the 20 year old bright, intelligent State School Arts Student is neither criminal nor repulsive. She is sane and aims at self exploration rather than Clegg's justification for his violent, abhorrent actions. Both of them are never willing to appreciate the other. And their notions about one another are based on the prejudiced notions of their respective classes. Miranda asserts, *"He is absolutely inferior to me in all ways. His one superiority is his ability to keep me here. That's the only power he has"* [Fowles, Pg.238]. Clegg is an outsider in Miranda's domain as she has the access to dominant ideology. But since she is the Captive, the only ideology is that of Clegg which she has to understand and follow. Miranda at times also tries to make Clegg know that he is mentally ill and also sympathizes with him. At times she also undergoes Stockholm syndrome [1] which is a condition that causes hostages to develop a psychological alliance with their Captors during captivity. As she states *"I should not but I like it when he comes in at lunch time from wherever he goes"* [Fowles ,Pg.217]. She also feels pity for Clegg for not being able to express himself and knows she is the reason for his madness and inability. She asserts *"I know it's pathetic, I know he is a victim of a miserable non conformist suburban world and a mistake social class."* [Fowles, Pg.206]

To sum up, both Clegg and Miranda want emotional affection without any physical connection. They hate Class and have prejudiced Gender. In Clegg's opinion women should be pure, innocent and weak. When Miranda tries to seduce him in return for her freedom he considers her a typical woman and at once withdraws and despises her. Miranda on the contrary thinks that men are jokes and cannot withstand the miseries that women can as in her case, she is held captive and still she hasn't loosed her hope of escape. She claims herself to be "superior" to Clegg. Both of them are more or less belonged to the broken families. Clegg was abandoned by his mother and though Miranda's parents are still married, her Mother is an alcoholic and too preoccupied within herself. So both of them are in solitude. On the other hand, there are many differences between Clegg and Miranda. Clegg is socially inept, unable to show his emotions and lies in his own world. Miranda wants to do innovative things and is of the thought that alive things are beautiful even if they are not complete. For e.g.) they think butterflies are beautiful, but Clegg being an Etymologist prefers them dead in his collection. He

also loves Photography but do not have any interest in Art. His concept of love is based on his prejudice inexperience and TV serials whereas Miranda's concept of love is clear and sees it as a bonding and compatibility between the two lovers. She feels she cannot accept anyone whom she doesn't belong and at the same cannot accept love from anyone who doesn't belong to her. But Clegg deliberately fails to understand her and her mere presence as his "**Guest**" catalyses Clegg, first from an innocent romantic to a kidnapper and lastly to a Psycho killer. Clegg is not entirely a victim of circumstances. Soon Clegg preys his next victim who he feels is as beautiful as Miranda and justifies his act by making his guest to someone of his class which would definitely work.

*'The Collector'* is a multi layered novel with many twists and turns and it is sometimes difficult to attach a distinct genre label to it. The most amazing feature about the novel is every time one reads it, there is something new to be found.

### **Bibliography:**

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