

## Repression: A Road to Neurosis in John Fowles' The Collector

Raj Kumar Baral

Lecturer, Tribhuvan University, Nepal

Corresponding Author: Raj Kumar Baral, E-mail: raju.baral@cdetu.edu.np

### ARTICLE INFO

### ABSTRACT

Received: July 02, 2019

Accepted: August 15, 2019

Published: September 30, 2019

Volume:2

Issue: 5

DOI: 10.32996/ijllt.2019.2.5.6

### KEYWORDS

*Obsession, neurosis, repression, traumatic experiences*

The analysis of John Fowles's *The Collector* explores the meaning of obsessive activities—doing something as a neurotic patient forgetting every other thing—of central male character Clegg. Clegg has obsession with Miranda, photography and pornography because of which he involves in entrapping Miranda, and taking different photos of her. His surrender towards art reveals his repressed desires. Because of the constant conflict of id and ego in service of super-ego, the mind of Clegg is inflicted from obsession and acts like a neurotic patient.

The central characters of John Fowles' novel *The Collector*- Frederick Clegg and Miranda Grey-guided by traumatic experiences caused by the repressive desires registered in their unconscious, involve in obsessive activities resulting in neurosis. This paper mainly examines Clegg's obsession with Miranda, photography and pornography and his surrender to art as revelation.

The neurosis is caused by memories of painful experiences, which are repressed. Confined to the unconscious level of the individual's mind, and by bringing them to awareness, one can get relief. Freudian therapy works only when the patient obeys the fundamental rule that s/he must say everything that comes into his or her mind even if it is disagreeable or nonsensical. For CelinSuprenant (2006), "The patient is pressed to tell embarrassing thoughts which s/he would rather keep quiet about" (p199). The patient must know that s/he has curiously to tell the analyst what he does not know i.e. his thoughts, which are familiar to himself. He is asked to repeat the same alien ideas or omit a crucial one. Patient is made to do all opposite of what he aims to do just neurotic symptoms do in the course of everyday actions. The cure also involves the process of transference whereby the patient unconsciously takes the analyst to be the reincarnation of important figures from his or her childhood or past. With the analyst, the patient repeats repressed affective experiences. According to Sigmund Freud (1991), "Unconscious mental activity permanently

determines our conscious life so that symptoms mental illness and even normal mental life remain explicable without the hypothesis that unconscious mental activity permanently determines gives and form to and participates in our conscious life (p 99).

Skura Meredith (1992) says "From the 1890's onwards psychoanalysis endeared to provide a theory for explaining this disturbing participation and therapy for alleviation its pathological effects"(p 369). Psychoanalysis studies neurotic symptoms in conjugation with dreams, jokes and the psychopathology of everyday life, that is mistakes of all sorts such as slip of tongue or of pen bunged action, forgetting as well as art, literature and religion with a view towards establishing the laws of functioning of the 'mental apparatus' as Freud calls this hypothetical model of the mind or the psyche.

The idea of being a master of any situation is a prevailing ideal for a neurotic. Clegg never understands anything that Miranda says because he cannot and doesn't want to understand the terms that she uses in her attempts to express herself to him. Because of her lack of real experience, her life imitates art. Aesthetic metaphors are her only means of self-expression, and perhaps the greatest irony lies in the abject uselessness of these metaphors, which means absolutely nothing to Clegg. Not only does Miranda die in the end because she cannot make Clegg understand that she is really sick, but throughout the novel all of her words die because they are couched in a medium that Clegg can never understand.

Neurotic characters are affected by anxiety due to their obsession attitude towards something. They cannot be courageous in the face of danger rather they feel helpless. Despite their helplessness they consider themselves as the master of any situation because to feel helpless for them, is unbearable. In the novel, Clegg, obsessed by Miranda, makes a plan of kidnapping her. He imagines, “. . . I captured her and drove her off in the van to a remote house and there I kept her captive in a nice way. Gradually she came to know me and like me and the dream grew into the one about our living in a nice modern house, married, with kids and everything” (p 19). He also imagines the house that he expects for entrapping her. In his imagination, he:

. . . went back to the house and got the key out and went down into the cellars again. The inner one must have been five or six feet under the earth. It was damp, the walls like wet wood in winter, I couldn't see very well because I only had my lighter. It was a bit frightening, but I am not the superstitious one. (p 22)

This excerpt shows Clegg's utter intension of owning Miranda. He, being too much anxious, wants to show himself as the master and to compensate his anxiety showing his superiority albeit only over Miranda.

Obsessive character defends him from anxiety by regularly thinking or doing something persistently. Clegg's constant thinking towards Miranda is also the result of Clegg's obsession. These activities of Clegg show him an obsessive character with an utter intension of possessing her because he forcefully traps Miranda and deprives her from enjoying her right and freedom. He acts as if he has nothing else to think except to kidnap her and enjoy as a neurotic character. As he narrates the scene of capturing Miranda, he says:

She didn't make a sound, she seemed so surprised, I got the pad I'd been holding in my pocket right across her mouth and nose, I caught her to me, I could smell the fumes, she struggled like the dickens, but she wasn't strong, smaller even than I'd thought. . . . I got her half into the van . . . got in and pulled her after me . . . I rolled and lifted her on to the bed. She was mine, I felt suddenly very excited. (p 28)

Clegg feels fundamentally helpless toward a world, which is invariably menacing and hostile, he searches for affection, which for him is one of the logical and direct ways of reaching out for any kind of

benevolence, help or appreciation but his way of searching is hostile and forceful.

Clegg's happiness knows no bound as his plan to kidnap and imprison Miranda becomes successful as scheduled. After locking Miranda in a dark cold room, Clegg expresses his joy as:

After, she was always telling me what a bad thing I did and how I ought to try and realize more. I can only say that evening I was very happy . . . and it was more as if I had done something very darling, like climbing Everest or doing something in my enemy territory. My feelings were very happy because my intentions were of the best. It was what she never understood. (p 31)

How an obsessive character enjoys in the pain and cry of others is evident in the above extract?

Clegg seems very oblivious towards the suffering and tortures Miranda had to undergo. Clegg articulates no sign of regret in kidnapping Miranda and shows no sympathy in her loneliness. Instead, he compares his misdeed with climbing Everest or defeating an enemy.

His obsession towards Miranda is strange. After being entrapped in the underground vault, in her desperate anger Miranda utters, “the only other thing is sex. You want to do something to me” (p 36). This question makes Clegg shocked and he responds that, “It's not that at all. I shall have all proper respect. I'm not that sort. I sounded quite curt” (p 36). Taking his activities as evidences, Miranda claims him of being a mad man. His obsessive activities, for Miranda, are analogous to the activities of a lunatic.

The craving for affection is so frequent in neuroses and so easily recognizable by the trained observer that “it may be considered one of the surest indicators for an existing anxiety and its approximate intensity” (Horney, p 106). In fact, if one feels fundamentally helpless toward a world, which is invariably menacing and hostile, then the search for attention would appear to be the most logical and direct way of reaching out for any kind of benevolence, help or appreciation. If the psychic conditions of the neurotic person were what they frequently appear to himself to be, it ought to be easy for him to gain affection. James C. Coleman (1971) writes:

Latent hostilities, his exacting demands do not interfere with his own relationships; nor is he able to judge the impression he makes on other or their reaction to him.

Consequently, he is at a loss to understand why his friendships, marriages, love affairs relations are so offer dissatisfaction. (p 76)

He tends to think that the others are fault, that they are inconsiderate, disloyal, abusive, or that for some unfathomable reasons he lacks the gift of being popular. Thus, he keeps chasing the phantom of love. The neurotic person whose protective device is a drive for affection is handily even aware of his incapacity to love. Most such persons will mistake their need of others for a disposition towards love, whether for individuals or for mankind in general. There is a pressing reason for maintaining and defending such as illusion. Richard Osborne writes, "Giving it up would mean uncovering the dilemma of feeling at once basically hostile toward people and nevertheless wanting their affection" (p 111). One can't despise a person, distrust him, wish to destroy his happiness or independence, and at the same time crave his affection, help and support. In order to achieve both ends, which in reality are compatible, one has to keep the hostile disposition strictly removed from awareness. The illusion of love, while it is the result of an understandable confusion between genuine fondness and need, has the definite function of making the pursuit of affection possible.

Inside the cell also Clegg doesn't forget to say her 'I Love you'. He expresses his inner egocentric feeling. Though Clegg uses the word 'love' to describe his emotion, it rather is merely his lust towards her attraction. He pretends to love her only because he wants to make her love him, which is obvious from his narration "the only treatment I need is you to treat me like a friend" (p 70). The words he utters do not represent the true picture of his mind since his mind has been neurotically paralyzed.

His motif of mastering others as a neurotic is visible when he does not let her to see papers and "never let her have a radio or television" (p 43). Sometimes he seems quite liberal towards Miranda as he says, ". . . I didn't want to break her down as the Gestapo wanted to break their prisoners down. But I thought it would be better if she was cut off from the outside world, she'd have to think about me more" (p 43). He thinks that Miranda is his possession and she should think about him and only for himself.

What is more disappointing and surprising is Clegg's expectation that trapping and depriving Miranda of the outside world will help to develop the feeling of love towards him in her heart. Emotions are not planned, they are natural. However, in case of Miranda she is forced to love him despite her

uncontrollable sense of hatred towards him. When Clegg asks Miranda "to try to understand" him and 'like' him she bursts out in anger and flows her true internal emotion: "I hate you, I hate you (p 46-47)". Despite her rejection, he observes every movements and activities of Miranda. He sees her as a woman who

. . . stood up and walked round the armchair and leant against the back, eyes on me all the time. She had taken her blue jumper off, she stood there in a dark green tartan dress, like a schoolgirl tunic, with a white blouse open at the throat. Her hair swept back into the pigtail. Her lovely face. She looked braved. . . . Suddenly I said I love you. It's driven me mad. (p 36-7)

Despite his knowledge that to say I love you is an old-fashioned and that can affect to nobody. He even remembers his dream where he "looked into [her] eyes . . . and kissed and nothing was said until after" (p 37).

Entrapped in a cell, too much worried Miranda demands for ". . . some fresh air and light and she utters, "I must have bath sometimes. I must have some drawing materials. I must have a radio or a record player. . . . I must have fresh fruit and salads. I must have some sort of exercise" (p 47). Clegg suspects of her escapement and argues, "If I let you go outside, you'll escape" (p 47). It shows that Clegg wants to entrap Miranda without giving any of the freedom she wants to enjoy. Neither she is given the opportunity to enjoy fresh air nor is she allowed to listen radio or record player.

In his obsession, Clegg makes a plan up to the extent that he is ready to kill Miranda in case the police come to arrest him in his house. He claims to possess some sort of power over her, which allows him to do what he thinks is true. The following extract exemplifies how obsessive power has corrupted the thought of Clegg and how he considers the killing of Miranda as his duty in order to be safe from the hand of law. In his obsessive mentality, he imagines:

. . . I had a horrible dream one night when they came and I had to kill her before they came in the room. It seemed like a duty and I had only a cushion to kill her with. I hit and hit and she laughed and then I jumped on her and smothered her and she lay still. (p 77)

For a neurotic, desire for affection is a protective device but s/he is hardly ever aware of his/her incapacity to love. Therefore, s/he shows deep interest on the subject which is hardly possible to acquire. When it seems impossible, a neurotic behaves as an obsessive character and sometimes uses force for its possession. As the novel progresses, the frustration of her failure to communicate closes in upon Miranda as oppressively as the walls of her basement prison. First, she tries to draw Clegg into the world of art. She argues:

I started to try to explain to him. I was boasting about one of the sketches . . . . It didn't mean anything to him, and he made it clear in his miserable I'll-take-your-word-for-it way that he didn't really care. . . . How could he see the magic and importance of art. . . I was so vain? (p 124)

How obsessive Clegg is known through his activities after kidnapping Miranda. No matter how hard she tries, however, he always closes and double locks the door between himself and any kind of human relationship with her. Clegg says, "She struggled to get the gag off, but I got the door closed first and the bolts in. I heard her cry, come back! Then again but not loud" (p 30).

Clegg is incapable of participating in emotional, aesthetic experience just as he is incapable of participating in sexual experience. His psyche, obsessed with burying the living and preserving and studying the dead, always remains encapsulated in the safety of its world of death and never ventures out into the world of life and art.

Clegg's embarrassment with art mirrors his external embarrassment and subconscious guilty fascination with sexuality. Clegg is a collector who fears the very things that he collects. As long as he can stand back and passively contemplate the dead objects in his collection Clegg is satisfied, but when Miranda forces him to become actively involved with her—the most exquisite of the objects in his collection—it proves to be a very unsatisfying experience. He must restore his collection to normality and, for Clegg, normality means death.

Another obsession of Clegg's deranged psyche, his fascination with photography, adds a new dimension to the motif of collecting and gives even a fuller definition to Clegg's obsessive psyche. When G. P. criticizes one of Miranda's drawings by saying, "You are photographing here" his tone is openly derisive (p 149). He sees photography as mechanical, purely imitative, and literal, while art is human, original,

expressive and often abstract. The photographer is only a technician, an appendage to a machine, but the artist becomes humanly involved with his subject. The difference between photography and art is the different between machine and man, between scientist and humanist—"I hate scientists," Miranda says, "I hate people who collect things and classify things and give them names and forget all about them. That's what people are always doing in art" (p 55).

Clegg's interest on photography stems from two equally complex subconscious motives. He takes up photography as a hobby, first, to satisfy a stunned misguided desire to be artistic, and second, to satisfy a much more complex, and more deranged, sexual desire. Clegg's first motive is pathetic because it is so unattainable. Somewhere deep within himself Clegg desires to be an artist, but because his existence is death directed. He expresses his aesthetic desire quite early in his narrative, but his own words betray a sense of the futility of his hope. As he tries to describe Miranda's beautiful hair, he laments, "I wish I had words to describe it like a poet would or an artist" (p 64). Miranda senses this desire and says, "I know why he likes the photographing business. He thinks it makes me think he's artistic. In addition, of course he has not a clue. I mean he gets me in focus, and that's all. No imagination" (p 134). Clegg's photography is another form of collecting. Instead of pinning butterflies, he is capturing nature with a machine; he doesn't project any part of himself into his photographs. He does not try to compose his photos, or give them a special coloring, or an original perspective.

Clegg's other subconscious motive form for practicing photography is much more sinister, much more dehumanizing and destructive than his comparatively innocent desire to be an artist. From the very beginning, Clegg's interest in collecting and in photography is linked to his interest in pornography: he is a voyeur. Unable to function sexually himself, he temporarily is satisfied with thumbing through books of stark woman. Then he graduates his voyeurism into photography. "The main idea," he writes of his taking up photography, "was to take butterflies living . . . but also often before I used to come on things out collecting, you'd be surprised the things couples get up to in places you think they would know better than to do it in, so I had that too"(p 15). The final addition to the motifs that define Clegg's characterization fulfills, in terms of the novel, Clegg's role as an obsessive character.

As his obsessive desire to take pornographic photographs rises, Clegg tries to justify his

perversion by invoking the name of art. The day before the mechanical rape, he asked Miranda to pose naked for photographs that he supposedly could use as a deterrent to keep her from telling the police about him after he releases her. "Not obscene" pictures, he says, simply "photos you wouldn't want published" (p 106). His idea of art-photography evidently comes from reading magazines, in which it is written, "There was one of the books called Shoes with very interesting pictures of girls, mainly their legs, wearing different sorts of shoes, some just shoes and belts, they were really unusual pictures, artistic" (p 108). However, pornography, especially photographs of headless organs randomly adorned with shoes or belts or taut ropes can never be artistic because it devalues the living, the human, the free, and it exalts the disembodied, the dehumanized, and the depraved. Miranda adamantly refuses to allow Clegg to apply the concept of art to his pornographic intentions for her. She screams, "You disgusting filthy mean minded bastard. . . . You're breaking every decent human law, every decent human relationship, every decent thing that's ever happened between your sex and mine" (p 107).

In the novel, pornography's crime is not against the 'public good' or 'the innocent child' but against art caused by his obsession. Pornography for Fowles is an existential crime, and when Clegg cuts off Miranda's head in his photographs he might as well be decapitating her with an ax. He is hacking away her identity and humanity in the name of his obsession destroying her art of life.

The images of collecting, of pornography, and of photography come together to define the artlife theme. By the end of the novel, the veteran collector Clegg is well on the way to becoming a connoisseur of pornographic photographs. Already he is

considering kidnapping another girl, "just . . . for the interest of the thing and to compare them" (p 225). He doesn't want to compare the girls, however; he wants to compare his porno-pictures of the girls. Clegg becomes as if the film end in the old horror film, *House of Wax*, who abducts beautiful women, kills them, and then covers their bodies with boiling wax in order to make the most artistic and true-to-life figures to populate his wax museum. He is an unscrupulous collector who perverts art by destroying life.

#### REFERENCES

- [1] Coleman, J. C. & Boren, W. E. (1971) *Abnormal Psychology and Modern Life*. (4th ed.). London: Foresman and Co.
- [2] Fowles, J. (2000). *The Collector*. London: Vintage.
- [3] Freud, S. (1991). *Essentials of Psychoanalysis*. Edited by. Anna Freud. London: Penguin Books.
- [4] Horney, K. (1937) *The Neurotic Personality of Our Time*. New York: W.W.Norton& Company Inc.
- [5] Osborne, R. (2000). *Freud for Beginners*. London: Orient Longman.
- [6] Skura, M. (1992). "Psychoanalytic Criticism." *Redrawing the Boundaries: The Transformation of English and American Literary Studies*. Edited by. Stephen Greenblatt and Giles Gunn. MLA, p349-373.
- [7] Surprenant, C. (2006). "Freud and Psychoanalysis." *Literary Theory and Practice*. Edited by. Patricia Waugh. New York: Oxford UP.