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Bluebeard and the voyeurs: *The Collector*

In writing *The Collector*, Fowles touched a nerve which has become increasingly sensitive in recent discussions about men—that of male violence against women and its relation to male sexuality. Clegg with his chloroform pad represents a male syndrome which Fowles described in an interview in 1974: 'I've always been interested in the Bluebeard syndrome, and really, that book [*The Collector*] was simply embodying it in one particular case. It's really a casebook for me.'[1] Fowles has said that the idea was developed from Bartok's opera *Bluebeard's Castle*, which contains 'the symbolism of the man imprisoning women underground' and which he synthesised with a contemporary newspaper report 'of a boy who captured a girl and imprisoned her in an air-raid shelter at the end of his garden... there were many peculiar features about this case that fascinated me.'[2]

The Collector is a 'casebook' in a number of ways. It sets a pattern for the later fiction by presenting a central male character as a case-study of particular forms of masculine behaviour. Fowles's declared interest in the early case-studies of Freud as almost 'fictional' psychoanalytic narratives links with this, although the narrative approach of *The Collector* is not directly analytical.[3] Equally, Clegg is a case-study of male behaviour in general: he is symptomatic of the male idealisation of women and of the way male power both feeds on and enforces itself through such idealisation. More problematically, the novel is a casebook of Fowles's own latent contradictions about the whole subject and his declared fascination for it, since, partly by virtue of its very narrative strategies, the book invites an almost voyeuristic interest from the reader. It is a point which suggests that Fowles himself is

a kind of Bluebeard, parading fantasies of power whose 'appeal' is thoroughly ambiguous. To elucidate this idea, it will be as well if we look in turn at the different ways in which the book functions.

As a case-study, the central male character Clegg embodies that classic schizophrenia of the male psyche which has institutionalised itself in sexual ideology by being perversely projected onto and superimposed upon women. Clegg is both Caliban and Ferdinand, the monster and the prince (*C*, p.199), the two polar opposites of the male spectrum. Miranda recognises it after her attempt to 'seduce' him, what she sees as 'this weird male thing. Now I'm no longer nice. They sulk if you don't give, and hate you when you do. Intelligent men must despise themselves for being like that. Their illogicality.' (*C*, p.254). The classic male view of women as madonnas to be worshipped and whores to be reviled always did say more about men than it ever could about women since it is precisely patriarchal ideology which invents and imposes the categorisation. It speaks of the male fear of women, sexuality and female sexuality specifically, a fear which paradoxically comes out of and gives rise to a need to repress the mother in order to maintain male power and control.[4] One literary version of this male schizophrenia is Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886).[5] Like Shakespeare's Ferdinand/Caliban model, and Hardy's Angel Clare/Alec d'Urberville, it poses the sexual split in terms of men rather than expressing it in terms of women, as patriarchal ideology does normally. The perverse Hyde is the idealist Jekyll's alter ego. The contradictions between the rational and the sexual, between authoritarian control and irrational passion, are shown as centred within the male as the pivots of patriarchy. Like Stevenson's text, *The Collector* presents this schizophrenia, with its accompanying *wille zür macht*, in action: Clegg's Jekyll-and-Hyde responses are seen being projected onto Miranda and, by making him both Ferdinand and Caliban, the book suggests that he is the prototype of masculinity. The critical overview in the book is provided through a narrative which presents Clegg dialectically, from his own position and from Miranda's; but this 'inside story' approach has its own peculiar repercussions.

Clegg's narrative shows him to be both the perpetrator and the

victim of the paradoxes of male power. In his case they take a specific and aggravated form, but the book allows us to see all men as potential if not actual Cleggs—collectors, possessors, controllers, using power to compensate for inadequacy. Fowles has described his view of the 'narcissistic and parasitical' hobby of collecting and its links with totalitarianism: 'Any one who still collects (i.e. kills) some field of living life just for pleasure and vanity has all the makings of a concentration-camp commandant.'[6] Clegg's collector mentality is a compensation for his sense of personal deficiency. Sexually, he is split. His desire for 'higher aspirations' (*C*, p.12) and his rejection of the 'crude animal thing I was born without' (*C*, p.10), and which he sees in the men at work, are the other side of the coin to his evasively expressed fascination for pornography, sex as passive consumption. The two are manifest in his dreams about Miranda. The 'nice dreams' are the ones in which she enacts roles in which both of them achieve an ideal middle-class marriage—'Nothing nasty', Clegg insists, but 'of course the other men all green round the gills.' (*C*. p.6) The other dreams occurred after seeing her out with another man: 'I let myself dream I hit her across the face as I saw it done once by a chap in a telly play.' (*C*, p.7) The two sides are brought together in his dreams about Miranda being attacked, in which Clegg is both her rescuer and 'the man that attacked her, only I didn't hurt her; I captured her' (*C*, p.16). Clegg's 'idealism' is seen to be one and the same as his urge to possess, and this forms part of a wider theme. Fowles's men cannot see what they are doing to other people because of a constitutional self-centred egoism which is central to the social legacy of masculinity, part of its 'crust'. Clegg cannot believe that Miranda will not at some point accept and understand him: 'if she's with me, she'll see my good points' (*C*, p.17) he thinks and, worryingly, some male critics have been inclined to agree with him. The American, Peter Wolfe, who is the most overtly male-orientated of Fowles's critics, quotes and seemingly endorses a comment by Thomas Churchill in which he says of Clegg and Miranda 'The boy and girl are not really much different... they might find a way if they worked at it hard enough.'[7] This suggests an astounding blindness to the realities of male violence and possession but, as we shall see in the other

novels, it is by no means untypical of the approaches some male critics adopt to Fowles's work.

Clegg's emotional and sexual fascism is common to all Fowles's male characters, though it differs in degree of intensity or overtness. The situation of locking Miranda up is, of course, both a real possibility and a metaphorical model, marriage being the most obvious analogy and one the book overtly suggests on a number of occasions (*C*, pp.51, 149). The interesting point is the way this situation is related to more general elements in male ideology and power.

Fowles has suggested that Clegg is to be seen as a product of his time, historically shaped by accelerating consumer capitalism and the seedy reality of the acquisitive society of the late 1950s. In the preface to *The Aristos*, Fowles explains the book in terms of its being a 'parable' dealing with class and inequality, the conflict between his own problematic categories, 'the Few and the Many': 'I tried to show that his evil was largely, perhaps wholly, the result of a bad education, a mean environment, being orphaned: all factors over which he has no control.' (*A*, p.10) Clegg's turning of living things into objects to be possessed can be equated with what Fowles identifies as the 'tendency of any capitalist society [which] is to turn all experiences and relationships into objects' (*A*, p.164). It is a case of Fowles showing Clegg as the product of his environment and reproducing its dominant values—capitalism, masculinity and neo-fascism forming an equation which Fowles hovers uneasily around more explicitly in the later novels.

Yet Clegg is far from being a 'macho' male. He is, even in Miranda's view, 'Exactly the sort of man you would *not* suspect. The most unwolf like.' (*C*, p.128) Part of his problem is precisely an inability to measure up to a stereotypical male image, an outcome of his upbringing if we take Fowles's views in *The Aristos* seriously. The early death of his father, and his mother who 'went off soon after' (*C*, p.7), left him with his aunt and uncle. Though Uncle Dick was 'as good as a father' (*C*, p.8), Clegg's situation is close to that which Fowles has outlined as the 'predisposing cause in outright paedophilia'—an 'unloving or rejecting mother, and a father who fails to provide the "male model" of the standard Oedipal situation. The child-victim will thus be turned in and

self-fixed at an exceptionally early age.'[8] It would be inaccurate to apply this to Clegg directly, but it demonstrates Fowles's own predisposition to understand male sexual phenomena in terms of their relations to the wider social and psychological construction of masculine models. Clegg is not a 'normal' male, but only in the extent to which he acts out his fantasies of power.

In Clegg's case, the pursuit of power as a compensation for his insecurities is managed through his pools win. 'Money is Power', he asserts with a characteristic cliché: 'In my opinion a lot of people who may seem happy now would do what I did or similar things if they had the money and the time.' (*C*, p.23) Reading about his own abduction of Miranda in the newspapers 'gave me a feeling of power, I don't know why.' (*C*, p.44) He institutes their 'relationship' on a basis which he controls physically and economically, but in which he is dependent upon her emotionally: 'She always seemed to get me on the defensive. In my dreams it was always the other way round. . . In my dreams it was always we looked into each other's eyes one day and then we kissed and nothing was said until after.' (*C*, p.37) 'You want to lean on me', Miranda tells him, 'I expect it's your mother. You're looking for your mother.' Clegg suggests to her 'You could lean on me financially', to which she retorts 'And you on me for everything else? God forbid.' (*C*, p.63) What Clegg wants from Miranda is the impossible compensation for his own sense of loss and desire[9] and the only way he can get that is through forcing her into the role of embodying his fantasies. As Miranda later realises, 'I'm not acting like the girl of his dreams I was. I'm his pig in a poke.' (*C*, p.246)

Clegg sees himself as 'a cruel king' (*C*, p.41) and models his control of Miranda significantly enough on tactics gleaned from a book called *Secrets of the Gestapo* (*C*, p.44). Miranda's self-analogy with Anne Frank (*C*, p.233) confirms the neo-fascist element we are invited to see in Clegg. Equally, however, his desire for power over her finds its expression in a thoroughly romanticised idealism. He fantasises that she will become submissively doll-like and allow him to 'love' her (*C*, p.37). He embodies a nostalgically 'old-fashioned' attitude of being 'in love', although he knows that, according to a 'chap called Nobby in the RAPC who knew all about women. . . you shouldn't ever tell a woman you loved her.

Even if you did.' (*C*, p.37) He presents his love in terms of romantic clichés whose function is to indicate how second-hand a part of sexual ideology Clegg's views are: Miranda becomes 'the purpose of my life' (*C*, p.20); 'I knew my love was worthy of her' (*C*, p.30); 'you're all I've got that makes life worth living' (*C*, p.54); 'It was like we were the only two people in the world' (*C*, p.68). But at the same time these clichés are self-exposing, they also serve to probe the ideology of romantic love itself, to reveal how analogous it is to Clegg's possessiveness. Like William Blake's 'The Clod and the Pebble', Clegg's case suggests that the selfless idealism of love is merely the inverse of its possessive impulse; under patriarchal forms, love relationships are predicated as power battles serving male interests.

Romantic idealism and a desire for power, then, are in Clegg's terms the same, since both turn women into instruments for male gratification. The connection becomes clear in his obsessive need to take photographs of Miranda. The American feminist Andrea Dworkin has argued that the pornographic photograph is 'the ultimate tribute to male power: the male is not in the room, yet the women are there for his pleasure. His wealth produces the photograph; his wealth consumes the photograph; he produces and consumes women.'[10] Clegg's interest is in the passive image of Miranda, an object which is his imagined version of her rather than her as a person. It is a form of self-desire enacted through the use of another and, according to the novelist André Malraux, a feature of male desire itself.[11]

When Miranda demonstrates that she *is* autonomous and challenges his fantasies, he reacts with force, to make her passive and turn her back into a controllable image. Thus, when she attempts to escape, having realised that he will not keep his promise to let her go, it is then that he re-uses the chloroform pad, strips her whilst she is unconscious and photographs her: 'It was like I'd showed who was really the master.' (*C*. p.94) Even more decisive is the episode shortly after when Miranda tries to break Clegg's hold over her by giving herself to him sexually. As this is her initiative, the fact of Clegg's impotence is all the more agonising to him: 'She made me look a proper fool. . . I felt she was despising me, I was a freak.' (*C*, p.110) It is this that shatters

Clegg's illusions but he blames her sexual overtness for his reactions: she 'killed all the romance, she had made herself like any other woman' (*C*, p.114). As a result he feels quite justified in asking her to pose for more photographs—'You took your clothes off, you asked for it. Now you got it.' (*C*, p.118) What he finally hates about Miranda is precisely that she *is* real and that she does not subserve his idea of her, and because of that she exposes rather than allays his insecurities. His reaction is to twist his idealism inside out, showing its real basis in a desire for power as he humiliates and degrades her. His consolation now is the photographs which 'prove' his sexual capacity:

> Because I could do it.
> The photographs (the day I gave her the pad),
> I used to look at them sometimes. I could take my time with them. They didn't talk back at me.
> (*C*, p.113)

Miranda's response is 'Oh, God you're not a man, if only you were a man' (*C*, p.121), instead of 'a dirty little masturbating worm.' (*C*, p.120)

Clegg's narrative has the same perversely psychotic quality as Browning's portrait of an equally possessive and destructive male 'lover' in 'Porphyria's Lover'. But the point is not that Clegg is abnormal. As he says disturbingly to Miranda, 'you think I'm not normal keeping you here like this. Perhaps I'm not. But I can tell you there'd be a blooming lot more of this if more people had the money and the time to do it. Anyway there's more of it now than anyone knows.' (*C*, p.75) The implication is that all men are in one sense or another complicit in a system of power relations rooted in forms of appropriation and violence as means of dominance and control. The pervasive male ways of seeing women are an appropriation, as are the patriarchal forms of the social structure which limit and confine women to certain roles, economic expectations and restricted opportunities. Their *raison d'être* is the perpetuation of male privilege in different manifestations. In sexual terms, Clegg exemplifies the forms masculinity takes in the contemporary world. All men may not act out the fantasies Clegg

has in the manner in which he does, just as all men may not be actual rapists; but potentially they can and are because of the relation of social power and dominance they maintain over women. The violent forms into which sexual relations have been shaped, whether it be rape, pornography, prostitution, marital coercion, actual physical violence, psychological pressure, or whatever, are all constructed to embody and enforce dominantly male prerogatives. Fowles explores the implications of these issues through Miranda's narrative and her views of Clegg.

In a moment of perhaps unintentional directness, Miranda writes in her diary 'The ordinary man is the curse of civilisation.' (*C*, p.137) In the context, she means in the sense of class, but the statement has the obvious gender application too. That this is not fanciful becomes apparent when we discover that she associates rationalism with being male, 'all that clumsy masculine analysis' (*C*, p.140). Collecting is also male, as we might expect. Collectors, like scientists, are destructive in Miranda's eyes, 'anti-life' (*C*, p.132). They are interested in the thing as object with themselves as the dominant subject, rather than in the living relation between things of equal autonomous being. Clegg embodies this rationalistic, possessive male principle, whereas Miranda herself embodies in part a Zen-like intuition of essences and interrelatedness. By implication, this is the antidote to Clegg's self-centred male egoism. Given Fowles's own predisposition, this suggests a privileging of Miranda's narrative, but the book does not fully endorse it. She is, as Fowles himself has pointed out, 'arrogant in her ideas, a prig, a liberal-humanist snob' (*A*, p.10). While many of the values and ideas Miranda expresses are used critically to analyse Clegg, the book's strategy is to intertwine this evaluation with Miranda's reflections on her friend and mentor George Paston in such a way as to broaden the impact of the analysis to include directly other men. Unwittingly, Miranda provides in G.P. a mirror image for Clegg, another man whom she admires but who the reader can see as a version of Clegg, another *man*.

When Miranda recounts taking her friends Piers and Antoinette to meet G.P., she describes how he drove them out of his house in anger. As Miranda turned to go back, Antoinette

warned 'Darling, he'll murder you' (*C*, p.179). Miranda excuses G.P.'s manners at the end of this entry in her diary because basically 'he was *sweet*'. But the very next entry opens 'I don't trust him. He's bought this house.' (*C*, p.180) The carry-over of the male pronouns links up Clegg and G.P. into interchangeable male personae. In G.P.'s case, his masculine outlook takes a more subtly invidious form. G.P. is distinguished for Miranda because 'he has (except over women) principles' (*C*, p.183). Woman are his 'one horrid weakness' (*C*, p.151). For G.P. himself, woman are 'a disease' whose name he won't reveal to Miranda since 'you don't tell diseases their names' (*C*, p.187). His brutal criticism about her own work—'It was as if he had turned and hit me with his fist... It hurt like a series of slaps across the face' (*C*, p.168)—might be excused on the grounds of artistic integrity, though his comments hardly strike the chord of being disinterested: 'you don't really stand a dog's chance anyhow. You're too pretty. The art of love's your line: not the love of art.' (*C*, p.170) What is revealed through Miranda, despite her own eventual espousal of G.P.'s philosophies of 'natural' sexuality, is his Don Juanism: he is a seducer and in that sense a collector. Like Urfe in *The Magus*, G.P.'s approach to women is to get them to feel sorry for him and then exploit them emotionally. Again, as with Urfe, the spurious decency of his recognition of this is part of the game. He slept with Miranda's friend Antoinette deliberately to 'exorcize' Miranda (*C*, p.227), and she documents his response to her own sense of injury:

> He said, men are vile.
> I said, the vilest thing about them is that they can say that with a smile on their faces. (*C*, p.190).

In his attitude to Miranda, G.P. is also shown as fantasising his relations with women into romantic illusions of being 'in love'. When Miranda tells Clegg the beauty and the beast story, she says 'now it's your turn to tell a fairy story'. Clegg replies 'I love you' and Miranda's comment on his words is 'They were quite hopeless. He said it as he might have said, I have cancer.' (*C*, p.199-200) G.P.'s view of being 'in love' is that it is a constitutional hazard for men: 'You've never been deeply in love. Perhaps you

never will be. He said, love goes on happening to you. To men.' (*C*, p.226) Clegg's reaction to his 'love' for Miranda is to capture her and lock her up. G.P.'s is to send her away, to stop seeing her because 'I can't go on being disturbed by you.' (*C*, p.226) Both reactions are equally self-centred in outlook, and both men exercise their power over her. The suspicion even crosses Miranda's mind that G.P.'s decision to send her away was a gambit of sexual politics in order to catch her, 'a trap. Like a sacrifice in chess. Supposing I had said on the stairs, do what you like with me, but don't send me away?' (*C*, p.230) This echoes her comment to Clegg after their walk round the garden, when she felt he wanted to kiss her: she makes him promise not to do anything to her 'in a mean way. I mean don't knock me unconscious or chloroform me again or anything. I shan't struggle, I'll let you do what you like.' (*C*, p.67) At times her view of G.P. could be directly interchangeable with her speculations about Clegg in the shared ambivalence of their motives and behaviour: 'Of course G.P. was always trying to get me into bed. I don't know why but I see that more clearly now than I ever did at the time. He shocked me, bullied me, taunted me—never in nasty ways. Obliquely. He didn't even force me in any way. Touch me. I mean, he respected me in a queer way.' (*C*, p.192) Her relations with both men have the nature of a battle or power struggle in which she is the subjected victim.

In both cases, the romantic illusions are seen as an aspect of the male urge to control. This is confirmed at the point when Miranda recognises Clegg's own Jekyll-and-Hyde personality, which we see as synonymous with the other two men in the book. Of Clegg she writes, 'Deep down in him, side by side with the beastliness, the sourness, there is a tremendous innocence. It rules him. He must protect it.' (*C*, p.252) It is an insecurity about feelings, particularly sexual, which leads to a defensive imposition of power and a desire to possess. This 'weird male thing' is Clegg's 'secret' (*C*, p.254), a sexual and emotional impotence: 'He can't do it. There's no man in him.' (*C*, p.252) Later Miranda is suddenly convinced of 'The power of women! I've never felt so full of mysterious power. Men are a joke.' (*C*, p.258) The joke is partly the contradiction between feeling and fear, the need for and fear of

dependency unless under the male prerogative. The other man in Miranda's life, Piers, exhibits the same syndrome. When, in France, Miranda met Jean-Louis, Piers reaction was 'crude... That stupid clumsy frightened-of-being-soft English male cruelty to the truth... that arrogance, that insensitivity of boys who've been to public schools.' (*C*, p.210-11) G.P. demonstrates a similar split. When Miranda daydreams about him she recognises her illusions for what they are:

> I've been daydreaming (not for the first time) about living with G.P. He deceives me, he leaves me, he is brutal and cynical with me, I am in despair. In these daydreams there isn't much sex, it's just our living together. In rather romantic surroundings... We are together, very close in spirit. All silly magazine stuff, really, in the details. But there is the closeness of spirit. That is something real. And the situations I imagine (where he forsakes me) are real. I mean, it kills me to think of them. (*C*, p.245)

The intriguing point here is not simply that this shows Miranda doing to G.P. what Clegg and G.P. do to her—making him up and fantasising about him, though crucially on totally different terms and with an awareness of the nature of her fantasies. It also demonstrates the narrative's own self-consciousness about the central issues of enacting ideological roles, pre-existent sexual models, the social fictions and scripts of gender.

So far, we have looked at the book and the characters as evidence of a case-study of masculinity, but to take this as unproblematic is to run the risk of falling into the contradictions within the book itself. Clegg is not, after all, a 'real' person whom we can simply take as providing insights into male behaviour. Fowles has said that he 'tried to write in terms of the strictest realism' in the book[12] and this is apparent; but necessarily we need to remain aware that the book is a fictional construction within Fowles's jurisdiction as a male author. Characteristically, Fowles makes use of this awareness of fictionality in order to explore how men impose and act out roles, but we also see the book's narrative working in ways which need investigating and exposing for their own latent sexual politics and Fowles's male assumptions.

As an initial point, it is noticeable that the book uses other 'fictions' as a ground for its narrative situation, most obviously *The*

Tempest and, to a lesser extent, Jane Austen's *Emma*. This tactic calls attention to the playing-out of roles, which are themselves fantasies, as they are transposed from the past onto the present. This helps to lay bare the way in which the male characters in particular are subject to a social mythology of masculinity, acting parts in the existing script of sexuality as it is presented in social ideology. 'Caliban is Mr Elton. Piers is Frank Churchill. But is G.P. Mr Knightley?' Miranda asks, exasperated at 'the awful problem of *the* man.' (*C*, p.230) This strategy of calling attention to fictional roles as a way of exposing the social myths of masculinity and gender is one of the central elements of Fowles's analysis in his fiction, and *The Collector* establishes it as a continuing means of investigation. It also makes a dialectical point about masculinity as social ideology. In the roles they play out and force on women, men have the power, a political reality which cannot be forgotten without losing the central issue. But within these roles, men themselves remain bound and constricted by the masculine crust, by the very limits of masculinity, to use Tolson's phrase. In a very real sense, then, Miranda tells Clegg 'You're the one imprisoned in a cellar' (*C*, p.62), a confinement which is forced on both him and her by the terms of power on which their 'relationship' is predicated.

Beyond Fowles's use of self-conscious fictionality, however, there remains his own masculine position from which he cannot escape as a male writer despite his self-critical awareness. This gender bias is present in the book without our needing to ascribe any of its content directly to Fowles: it is there in the way the book is structured and built.

We can illustrate this by considering the way the two narratives, Clegg's and Miranda's, function. There is an obvious dialectical effect in their interaction. By virtue of what Conradi describes as 'the gaps and disjunctures between Clegg's and Miranda's narratives',[13] the attempt at an almost common-sense coherence in Clegg's account is fractured and critically exposed, a tactic Fowles uses again in *Daniel Martin*. We realise also from the interaction between the two versions of events that, not only do they misread each other—not only is there none of the understanding Clegg expects, for example—but when Miranda

does actually sympathise with him, he cannot see it. The situation makes it impossible for either to see the other as 'real': Clegg's voice enters Miranda's narrative only as 'C.' or 'Caliban', while she exists in his in inverted commas and the past tense. But we need also to ask about the function of these narratives in relation to Fowles's own imagining of the situation and his construction of them. Like Ian McEwan, he has imagined himself into circumstances which are distinctly perverse; and in terms of the way the narratives might be read, this is both an exorcism and a fascination.

The American critic Barry Olshen learned in an interview with Fowles in 1977 that the idea of framing Miranda's narrative within Clegg's was 'an afterthought and came as a recommendation from Fowles's editor. The author had originally submitted the two accounts in sequence.'[14] He goes on to make an intriguing point about the form of Miranda's narrative:

> Because of the conventional assumption in the diary form that the writer is the only reader (or, as Miranda says, that she is 'talking to herself'), we must assume that we are getting a very private glimpse into the innermost thoughts and feelings of the diarist. We are thus ironically required to imagine ourselves in an analogous role to Clegg's, the role of the voyeur, reading what was never intended for us to read, and gaining vicarious enjoyment from this experience.[15]

Whether we get 'vicarious enjoyment' or not depends on *how* the book is read and by whom. One imagines it to be a quite different reading experience for a woman than it is for a man, partly because for the male reader it must be said that the book unlocks a male fantasy which has had general currency at least since de Sade, even whilst exposing its fundamental roots in a desire for power over women. In other words, *The Collector* constructs that fantasy in self-conscious form, but ambiguously.

Fowles admitted as much in a comment in the 'Hardy and the Hag' essay. Elaborating on the '*abnormally* close juxtaposition, or isolating, of a male and a female character [which] is so constant a feature of the male novel', what he calls the 'tryst', he goes on to say this:

> Though I gained the outward theme of *The Collector* from a bizarre real-life incident in the 1950s, similar fantasies had haunted my adolescence—not, let me quickly say, with the cruelties and criminalities of the book, but very much more along the lines of the Hardy tryst. That is, I dreamed isolating situations with girls reality did not permit me isolation with: the desert island, the aircrash with two survivors, the stopped lift, the rescue from a fate worse than death... all the desperate remedies of the romantic novelette; but also, more valuably, countless variations of the chance meeting in more realistic contexts. A common feature of such fantasies was some kind of close confinement, like Hardy's lerret, where the Well-Beloved was obliged to notice me; and I realise, in retrospect, that my own book was a working-out of the futility, in reality, of expecting well of such metaphors for the irrecoverable relationship. I had the very greatest difficulty in killing off my own heroine; and I have only quite recently, in a manner I trust readers will now guess, understood the real meaning of my ending... the way in which the monstrous and pitiable Clegg (the man who acts out his own fantasies) prepares for a new 'guest' in the Bluebeard's cell beneath his lonely house. It is a very grave fallacy that novelists understand the personal application of their own novels.[16]

This demonstrates Fowles's awareness of the pervasive hold over men of their mythologies of sexual power and the danger or 'futility... of expecting well of such metaphors' in reality. But it also reveals a notion of the novelist as a kind of Clegg, a collector of imagined women pursuing his own obsessions and, in the process, making available fantasies for reading. For Fowles it is both an exercising and an exorcism of power: it is after all he who 'kills' Miranda to make way for another version of the fantasy woman in another novel. But what is the relation of this to its possible readers? When Clegg is being shown round the cellar, the estate agent comments 'Just the thing for orgies' (*C*, p.19), no doubt with a knowing male wink. Is the Bluebeard syndrome simply exposed in the book, or is it at the same time obliquely catered for by the reader's illicit access to Miranda's diary and Clegg's reminiscences? Such access makes the point to the male reader at least that we are complicit voyeurs, but at the same time Miranda herself has been conceived from a male angle: 'The power of women! I've never felt so full of mysterious power... We're so weak physically, so helpless with things. Still, even today. But we're stronger than they [men] are. We can stand their cruelty. They can't stand ours.' (*C*, p.258) Is this a woman's view of this

imaginary woman's experience, or a man's? And by enclosing Miranda's narrative within Clegg's, in a certain sense the book contains her within his ongoing power, mounted like a specimen for our appraisal and gaze.

This is not to suggest that Fowles was deliberately offering a perverse voyeurism for the male reader of *The Collector*, though in effect that may well be one possible reading of the book. He himself didn't expect it to be a success, according to interviewer Richard Boston, who comments, 'which of course it was'.[17] Perhaps this was modesty on the part of a newly launched novelist, but in retrospect it seems surprising and even naïve. The media popularity of *The Collector*, both in book form and as a film which Fowles himself dislikes, is a significant phenomenon. Inescapably, this is the result as much of a vicarious fascination with the lurid and perverse elements in the book as of a wish to understand or exorcise from the mind the fantasy of the male abductor-rapist with power over women. The book is notable for a certain self-awareness over this issue. When Clegg picks up copies of the papers to read about Miranda's abduction, he reveals both the function of the media in constructing and representing narratives of sexuality and, inadvertently, comments on the fantasising function of the book itself. He buys 'the tripe papers' (*C*, p.42) which carry big photographs of Miranda with headlines like '*Have You Seen This Girl?*' Clegg comments: 'They all said she was pretty. There were photos. If she was ugly it would all have been two lines on the back page. I sat in the van on the road verge on the way back and read all the papers said. It gave me a feeling of power, I don't know why.' (*C*, p.43-4) How would it have affected the reading of *The Collector* if Fowles had made Miranda 'ugly'?

Then there is Clegg's narrative itself: a confessional? To a psychiatrist, a priest, a prison warder? Certainly an address to the reader on personal terms as all the conversational asides by 'yours truly' indicate. Or, for all the forced formalities, awkwardness and evasiveness, is it a perverse kind of lover's confession? In *The History of Sexuality*, French theorist Michel Foucault has pointed out how the confession is symptomatic of the modern organisation of sexuality as verbal discourse, particularly of supposedly

unnatural or aberrant forms of sexuality. The function of the confession is that 'it exonerates, redeems, and purifies him; it unburdens him of his wrongs, liberates him, and promises him salvation'. Foucault continues:

> Its veracity is not guaranteed by the lofty authority of the magistery, not by the tradition it transmits, but by the bonds, the basic intimacy in discourse between the one who speaks and what he is speaking about. On the other hand, the agency of domination does not reside in the one who speaks (for it is he who is constrained), but in the one who listens and says nothing; not in the one who knows and answers, but in the one who questions and is not supposed to know... It is no longer a question simply of saying what was done—the sexual act—and how it was done; but of reconstructing, in and around the act, the thoughts that recapitulated it, the obsessions that accompanied it, the images, desires, modulations, and quality of the pleasure that animated it. For the first time no doubt, a society has taken upon itself to solicit and hear the imparting of individual pleasures.[18]

There is no doubt that for Clegg his experience with Miranda was a 'pleasure', for he says as much on a number of occasions (*C*, p.282 for example). And, we remember, he is 'confessing' his pleasure after the fact, recapitulating his obsessions to, and for, the reader in preparation for a new experience. By 'listening' to Clegg's insidious confession does the reader in some peculiar way lend credence or give a certain kind of validity to his further exploits? Do we come out of the book realising that he is going to do it again and what the real implications of that are in the world outside the book? Or has it, for the male reader, provided a spurious pleasure of its own?

Probably both, a fact which, if true, expresses the male readers' own contradictory relation to the experience of masculinity. At the end of the book, Clegg's version of the male schizophrenia re-emerges. He envisages an idealised romantic fantasy as the finale for his relationship with Miranda, a farcically inappropriate Romeo and Juliet death scene in which, bereft by her death, he commits suicide alongside her. The fracture between this and his actual actions when the dead Miranda becomes literally a thing for him to dispose of epitomises the split in his psychology, the male contradiction which underpins the patriarchal control of women. Clegg's self-centred fantasy breeds Miranda's death,

Miranda says 'I could never cure him. Because I'm his disease' (*C*, p.257), but the book makes plain that what he suffers from and she dies from is his own power. Her comment suggests that men who look to women for salvation merely succeed in enmeshing them in their own webs. It is a conundrum which Fowles's next-published novel confronts in the most ambiguous terms.