

John Fowles' Clegg: *Captive Landlord of Eden*

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The one undisputed triumph of John Fowles' first published novel, *The Collector*, was the chilling portrait of Frederick Clegg, the drab and colourless clerk grown suddenly powerful with the winning of a large fortune in a football pool. The relevance of Clegg's presentation as an ill-educated, resentful social misfit has not faded with the passing years, and critics have rightly focused on Fowles' analysis through this character of the social and political forces which have shaped the Cleggs of this world. But what of the individual Clegg rather than the type? Paradoxically, an archetypal approach to Clegg allows us to locate the core of his personality; more specifically, an investigation of the archetypal associations of Eden as Fowles employs them in *The Collector* to establish the psychological dimensions of Clegg's personality reveals one of Fowles' central themes: the destructiveness of a failure to develop psychological strength and insight through a dialectical tension, as well as the pathos of an inability to acquire an attitude of imaginative consciousness toward life, which might be termed existentially aesthetic.

Fowles himself has said that being a writer means "being able to put your finger on the archetypal things in people's minds,"²¹ and taking this cue, critics have explicated his later novels, especially *The Magus* and *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in terms of Jungian archetypes as active personality fragments, such as the shadow or the anima or animus. In addition, commentators have drawn from a class of archetypes Jung calls "archetypes of transformation." These are "typical situations, places, ways and means that symbolize the kind of transformation in question."²² Thus, the quest motif in Fowles has been seen as a symbolic

representation of Jung's process of individuation, the personality's journey toward psychic wholeness. But I am concerned here with the *place* aspect of this class, as these structures may also be examined in their metaphoric form in literature as a means of communicating the "kind of transformation" being presented, or, as in Clegg's case, the "kind of transformation" which does not take place.

For Jung, places of "magic transformation and rebirth, together with the underworld and its inhabitants, are presided over by the Mother [archetype]." Such places as Paradise, churches, the sea, and gardens may symbolically represent "the goal of our longing for redemption," reverence, or creativity³ because they are representations of the complex of unconscious instincts associated with the mother-child relationship and its experience. But also associated with this complex is fear of personal obliteration, the dark, hidden power of the unconscious, and thus other representative associations with the mother are terrifying caves, the underworld of Classical mythology, or the Hell of Christian theology.

Or, in *The Collector*, the cellar of the isolated Sussex cottage which Clegg sees as an opportunity to create his own Eden, "far from the madding crowd," as it is advertised. In a 1977 essay entitled "Hardy and the Hag," Fowles indicates clearly the association in his mind between the fictional creation of isolated, confined situations involving a man and a woman and the creation of Eden:

The *abnormally* close juxtaposition, or isolating of a male and a female character is . . . a [constant] feature of the male novel. . . . I know myself how excitement mounts — If there had been a Creator, how much he must have looked forward to the chapter of Eden — as such situations approach. . . .⁴

The kind of Eden that Clegg creates is pictured in this remote cottage. Walled in on two sides, hedged on another, and with only one side open to the woods and fields surrounding it, it serves as an objectification of Clegg's own alienated, shuttered personality. Inside the house, the tasteless, mass-produced items provided by decorators are analogous to the conventional moral

and social ideas which furnish Clegg's conscious mind. He has "bought" them without thought or involvement. It is the cellar, however, for which Clegg buys the cottage. Having thought he had always wanted something "up-to-date," he is about to tell the real estate salesman he does not want the house, when the agent mentions the cellar. Clegg's interest is immediate, and he even goes back into it when the salesman leaves. Although Clegg lacks any real insight into himself or his motivations, he feels intuitively drawn by a dream-like atmosphere; with its separation from the upstairs, "it was like down there didn't exist. It was two worlds."⁵ Clegg's conscious mind has been impoverished and stunted by the culture which has shaped him, but ironically, hazard has co-operated with that culture to give him an opportunity to discover his unconscious mind.

The cellar is a place where Clegg can realize his fantasies and thereby create his own paradise. But because his mind is unable to conceive of paradise except in possessive, infantile, claustrophobic terms, what he creates is a demonic parody of Eden, the lowest end of the scale on which representations of the Edenic archetype might be arranged. The conventional elements of paradise are all present — the walled-in enclosure, the exclusiveness, the unchanging climate, the provision of all things without toil or pain, the expectation of supreme happiness, and, especially, Adam and Eve. Clegg says at one point, "It was like we were the only two people in the world" (p. 65). Yet because this Eden is a projection of an unconscious trapped in arrested development, it is a travesty. The magical qualities of transformation, so prominent in Edenic sites, do not operate here for Clegg, although, ironically, for Miranda the cellar does become the "special place" where the creativity and rebirth associated with the archetype are evidenced in her reaction to imprisonment.

The particular quality of the Eden of Clegg's unconscious may be more exactly defined by reference to the psychological state known as uroboric incest. In the process of the development of the self — in Jungian terms, referring to the whole, integrated personality — an early psychic trauma occurs when the ego must separate itself from the unconscious, a psychic process which is the equivalent of the fetus leaving the womb. The unconscious

experiences the world and itself as a unified, undifferentiated totality, and thus the emerging ego sets itself in opposition to it. Because this development is pre-consciousness, it is experienced by the individual in his relationship with his mother, who re-creates for the infant and young child this early sense of unity. But as the ego gains strength, the Good Mother as source and site of all becomes the Terrible Mother, for now the consciousness of individuality feels threatened by the undifferentiation of the unconscious state. In the development of the normal individual, this struggle is resolved successfully as the ego, in championing consciousness and overcoming fear of change, establishes itself as autonomous. This it accomplishes by perceiving the archetypes, now fragmented from the original uroboric unity into the shadow, the anima/animus, wise old man, and so forth, and incorporating them into the psychic structures. The process of what Jung has called "individuation" and Eric Neumann, his student, "centroversion" is complete when the two systems of the conscious and the unconscious are held in unity and constitute the self. This too is a uroboric state but one in which the whole personality is "centred" on the ego and held in equilibrium.⁶

Both Jung and Neumann believe that the tendency to regress, to "dissolve back into unconsciousness,"⁷ that is, into uroboric incest, can be creative: for them, the Mother archetype is the gateway to the unconscious, which is a rich seedbed for the creator. If, however, the ego is too weak to reassert itself after regressing to the unconscious, the individual remains trapped in a round of self-destructive activities leading to dissolution and death.

That Clegg is drawn to Miranda as his anima has been mentioned by a number of commentators, most notably Dwight Eddins and Robert Huffaker.⁸ Their observations are apt but perhaps not precise enough. Clegg is attracted to Miranda as his *potential* anima, but because his ego is underdeveloped, he is unable to move beyond the uroboric mother stage. His personality lacks the strong self-consciousness that would enable him to incorporate in his psychic structure the fragmented archetypes, thus unifying his self. He conceives of his relationship with Miranda in mother-son terms, and when Miranda mistakenly attempts to

humanize him by offering herself to him sexually, he feels threatened. From this point on, he sees her as not the Good Mother but the Terrible Mother, and he must destroy her in order to preserve his illusion of autonomy and control. However, as his plan to receive another "guest" unfolds, it is quite clear that he is trapped in a pattern of action signifying his growing submission to the destructive unconscious.

While it may be coincidental that the cottage Clegg buys is named "Fosters," a word associated with maternal solicitude, and equally coincidental that most of the women in *The Collector* have names beginning with *M*, Clegg's mother fixation is established explicitly in the narrative. Abandoned by his mother and raised by a cold, rigid, conventionally pious and hypocritical aunt, Clegg reaches adulthood with two conflicting concepts of women. Because his aunt has encouraged him to think of his mother as a prostitute, Clegg has a low opinion of most women, yet he retains an ideal concept, which he believes he sees in Miranda. The one attempt at normal sex that he relates, his visit to the prostitute, is unsuccessful, which he rationalizes by saying that he could not perform because of what Miranda might have thought of him. He channels his sexual urges into pornography and masturbation. He continually denies any sexual interest in Miranda, although his violent fantasies belie his protestations. The dreams he admits to consciously place her in a sexually neutral role as hostess and companion, and he repeats often that Miranda would "understand" him or that she would know how to love him, the implication being, as only a mother could. After he kidnaps her, she sees very early on that he is looking for a mother: after fixing tea one day, Clegg uses one of the stale expressions that form a large part of his vocabulary when he asks Miranda if he should be "mother," that is, if he should pour the tea. When she criticizes his language, he says "I think you'd better be mother," a response which evokes a knowing smile from Miranda. Later she records in her diary that she told him "he was looking for the mother he'd never had" (p. 127).

Although acute embarrassment in a man of Clegg's weak ego is enough to explain the extreme reaction Clegg has when he fails to respond to Miranda's sexual advances, his identification of her

with the maternal archetype makes his sudden revulsion even more understandable. She becomes for him like the real mother, "no better than a common street-woman" (p. 113), rather than the ideal mother he hoped to regain. As he says, "she didn't see how to love me in the right way. . . . She was like all women, she had a one-track mind. I never respected her again" (p. 109). Thus he must assert his power by degrading her through forcing her to pose for pornographic pictures and eventually allow her to die. Potential anima, Miranda is not strong enough to lure Clegg from his inertness; he destroys the burgeoning soul within him and with it his chances for transformation. Instead, he plans for another *M*, Marian, a clerk, appropriately enough, in a dime store, a typical sign of the cheap, consumer society which has provided Clegg with his values. Clegg may hope to assert his superiority over his next victim, but his quest for recovery of maternal love, for the key to Eden's gate, is, of course, doomed to defeat.

Fowles himself has explicitly linked the quest for the irrecoverable "eternal other woman, the mother" to *The Collector*. In his "Hardy and the Hag," Fowles discusses the mother as providing for the infant Edenic security, pleasure, and a sense of magical power. The universal loss of this Eden explains for Fowles both the artist's motivation to "devote his life to trying to regain unity and power by recreating adult versions of the experience"⁹ and the audience's response to art. The adult writer usually transforms the "well-beloved" (to use Hardy's term, as does Fowles) into a "young female sexual ideal of some kind, to be attained or pursued (or denied) by himself hiding behind some male character."¹⁰ The quest psychologically is doomed to failure, and in a literary sense, it *must* be so, for the necessity to repeat this "impossible journey" ensures in the author continuing renewal of his creativity, fueled by a "drive toward the unattainable."¹¹ That is, the writer in his fiction repeatedly attempts to recapture Eden in the form of a feminine ideal, but, to ensure the continuation of his creative life, he must fail, for success would mean the end of the writer's motivation.

Fowles then reveals that *The Collector* reflects his own psychological search, he himself "hiding behind" Clegg, an emo-

tional involvement that made Miranda's death necessary but very painful for him. Only later did he realize that Clegg was a surrogate figure whose need to pursue another woman after Miranda's death is a debased and distorted reflection of the artist's need for another "unattainable" goal:

Though I gained the outward theme of *The Collector* from a bizarre real-life incident in the 1950's, similar fantasies had haunted my adolescence — not, let me quickly say, with the cruelties and criminalities of the book . . . That is, I dreamed isolating situations with girls reality did not permit me isolation with. . . . A common feature of such fantasies was some kind of close confinement, . . . and I realize, 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 . . . 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 the lonely house.¹²

We may then see Clegg as an early, ironic presentation of the artist that Fowles believes each person must strive to become in shaping his life. Clegg is, of course, a failed artist doomed to write himself as a monster, as Caliban rather than the Ferdinand he would like to be. His butterfly collection and his photography have been discussed by a number of critics as exemplifying his mechanistic, aesthetically-deadening impulses.¹³ It has not been noted but nevertheless seems significant that the pictures Clegg shows Miranda are of woods and the sea, which Fowles considers images of the greatest freedom and creativity — sites which he often uses metaphorically and positively for the unconscious. The photographs are "dead," as Miranda says, and they serve both to project Clegg's own mind and to suggest his assault on the very matrix of life.

In addition, Clegg fails as creator of fiction: in his first conversation with Miranda, he tries to make up a story to explain the kidnapping to her, a wild tale about being in the power of the bank president, and Miranda sees through it immediately. Ironically, of course, he *is* in the power of something, the Mother archetype. Later, after Miranda rather cruelly has made up a

fairy tale about a princess and a monster and taunts him to create one, he can only stand silently, repeating that he loves her. His own narrative lacks the artistic objectivity even to allow for quotation marks around his own statements, although he does quote Miranda. His trite, cliché-ridden, dead language is put to the service of confused self-rationalization, and the lack of aesthetic shaping in his narrative is thrown into sharp relief when it is contrasted with Miranda's section, which is an exercise in self-examination and written in a variety of forms, including drama and fairy tales.

The Collector's ending is bleak; Clegg's burial of Miranda under an apple tree seems a savagely ironic commentary on the travesty of Eden that Clegg has created, Adam's ultimate revenge for Eve's betrayal. By arresting in flight and trapping the animating force of life, by attempting to hold in stasis what must by its very nature exist in a state of flux, of change and growth, Clegg ensures his own enslavement to forces which he can never understand and which will eventually effect his psychic death. Ironically, in one of his darkest moments, Clegg does see his situation, although he does not understand its implications:

It was just like a joke mousetrap I once saw, the mouse just went on and things moved, it couldn't ever turn back, but just on and on into cleverer and cleverer traps until the end. (p. 296)

For Fowles, the mind is truly its own place, and it carries within it an Eden universally experienced and universally lost. In *The Collector*, he shows us through Clegg negative and destructive responses to this loss. The well-spring of creative existence, the place of magic transformation within each, the garden must be revisited if one is to achieve a harmonious and productive life, but the attempt to linger in it is destructive; the garden withers, grows nasty and dank, and finally rots into disintegration and blackness.

NOTES

- ¹ Richard Boston, "John Fowles, Alone but Not Lonely," *New York Times Book Review* (9 November 1969), p. 2.
- ² Carl G. Jung, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Series, 2nd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1968), IX, I, 38.

- ³ Carl G. Jung, *Four Archetypes: Mother/Rebirth/Spirit/Trickster*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Bollingen Paperback Edition (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 15-16.
- ⁴ In *Thomas Hardy after Fifty Years*, ed. Lance St. John Butler (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1977), pp. 37-38.
- ⁵ John Fowles, *The Collector* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1963), pp. 16-17. All further references appear parenthetically in the text.
- ⁶ While both Jung and Neumann describe this process in a number of places, a convenient and fairly non-technical summary may be found in Erich Neumann, *The Origins and History of Consciousness*, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1973), pp. 261-312.
- ⁷ Neumann, p. 278.
- ⁸ Dwight Eddins, in his "John Fowles: Existence as Authorship," *Contemporary Literature*, 17, No. 2 (1976), 204-22, discusses Miranda in her "anima role" for G.P. and implies her similar function for Clegg; Robert Huffaker, in his *John Fowles* (Boston: Twayne, 1980), pp. 80-82, is more explicit in his discussion of Miranda as Clegg's "archetypal dream girl."
- ⁹ "Hardy and the Hag," p. 31.
- ¹⁰ "Hardy and the Hag," p. 33.
- ¹¹ "Hardy and the Hag," p. 31.
- ¹² "Hardy and the Hag," p. 38.
- ¹³ See John Palmer, *The Fiction of John Fowles: Tradition, Art, and the Loneliness of Selfhood* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1974), pp. 38-39; Peter Wolfe, *John Fowles: Magus and Moralist* (Lewisburg: Bucknell Univ. Press, 1976), pp. 66-67; Jeff Rackham, "John Fowles: the Existential Labyrinth," *Critique: Studies in Modern Fiction*, 13, No. 3 (1970-1972), 91-92; and Dwight Eddins, pp. 205-06 and 208-09.