

SUBVERSIVE CCULTURE AND POSTMODERNISM IN JOHN FOWLES'S THE COLLECTOR

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Abstract

The goal of this paper is to discuss the subversive elements in the famous novel of John Fowles *The Collector*. It also carefully analyzes the work in postmodernist perspective. The term 'subversive' according to Cambridge Dictionary is, trying to destroy or damage something, especially an established political system. The subversive elements present in this novel are class system, power of politics and the divisions among the people as 'FEW' and 'MANY'. The postmodern literature is the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period. The major features of postmodernism are experiment in narrative techniques, form, language, and expression. In this paper we can explore the different narrative techniques of John Fowles, his intertextuality, the subversiveness towards class distinction and many more. Fowles' multilayered fiction explored the tensions between free will and the constraints of society. It also played with the traditional novelistic conventions and challenged readers to give their own interpretations. He tells more yarns and suspense. The individual's behaviour is the result of society, cultural and social patterns. Fowles' is able to see the flaws in each human.

Keywords: Intertextuality, Subversiveness, postmodernism, constraints of society, class distinction, social patterns, power of politics, experimentation

John Fowles (31 March 1926-5 November 2005) was an award winning post World War II novelist of major importance. In 1951, he finished *The Magus* and began working on *The Collector*. *The Collector* was a famous novel at that time. He was at the peak of success in 1960's and 70's. He started writing in his early 20's, because he invented all possible situation in fantasies, which were denied for him in his early days. He was an avid collector of old books and a

fascinated student of fossils. After leaving Oxford University, Fowles taught English at a school in the Greek island of Spetses, a sojourn that inspired *The Magus*, an instant best-seller. This was followed by his fictional works *The Ebony Tower*, *Daniel Martin*, *Mantissa* and *A Maggot*. Fowles' books have been translated into many languages and several adapted as films.

His novels began with an original psychological thriller, *The Collector* (1963). Fowles' writing was dominated by the consciousness of the author as a figure within his own books. He enters into the narrative at certain points to comment on the action, the character's motives and possibilities and to explain how things might have been different. In an autobiographical essay, he mentioned that, he felt alienated from his parents. He has said that he had seemed to come from nowhere. So we can find that most of his heroes are alienated, orphaned and disconnect themselves from outside world. His life is reflected in most of his novels. His novels are undeniably brilliant, intricately plotted and more emotional. According to him, our stereotyping society stamps masks on our faces and makes us feel alone.

In this article, John Fowles' first novel has been analyzed. John Fowles' first novel *The Collector* was published in 1963. It has been reprinted several times and has been translated into many languages. *The Collector* is about a man who is subversive towards the class system in the society. *The Collector* is a story about the abduction of Miranda Gray, a student of art by Fredrick Clegg, a butterfly collector. The story is not in the usual form. It has four sections. The first section is the narration of Clegg about the abduction of Miranda. It is from his point of view. The second one is the words of Miranda, which is written in her diary. Third part is Clegg's narration about Miranda's death. The last part is Clegg's reentry as the collector of girls.

The first section begins with the plans of Clegg for the abduction of Miranda. He captures her with a rag soaked in chloroform. When she awakens, she finds herself in the basement room of Clegg's new brought house. She stays there unwillingly. Clegg tries to please her, with her favorite things. He appreciates her pictures and drawings. Their taste differs. There are many differences between them. Mainly it is the class difference. Miranda is from a middle class background is exhibited in many of the places throughout the novel. Clegg introduces her, when she was returning from the boarding school. In those days boarding schools were costly and only the wealthy could afford. Frederick feels inferior when he knows that Miranda's father is a doctor. He also heard her mother's speech in 'la-di-da' voices. It means she wanted to pretend herself as upper class or sophisticated than others. Frederick always finds a difference between the educated and being pretentious. As well as the football pools were the hobby of the working class

people like Clegg rather than the middle class people. Clegg used to earn more in the football pools.

The difference in education is also mentioned in the novel by emphasizing the books they read. Miranda quotes, Robinson Crusoe in her diary. She also compares Frederick to Holden Caulfield in J.D Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye*. Holden is his own enemy. He tries to connect with people but alienates them with his lack of empathy. Frederick reflects the same character towards Miranda. Miranda sometimes calls him Caliban and sometimes Ferdinand, the names from William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*. Caliban is the beast or monster in *The Tempest*, who tries to rape Miranda but in *The Collector* Frederick wants the pornographic photos of Miranda. She also disliked the taste of Frederick in choosing clothes and room décor. She looks down on his lack of art appreciation and compares his artistic knowledge with the knowledge of George Paston, her older friend whom she admires a lot. She finally tries to seduce him. This is her only idea is to escape from him but he asks her to pose for some pornographic photos. He immediately develops the fine pictures, cutting off her face. She caught a cold from Clegg and seriously affected. The first section ends with Clegg's recollection, "I thought I was acting for the best and within my rights (TC 113)".

The second section is Miranda's diary. She writes more about her beautiful life before abduction. She writes about her happy life and not about her hard life. After her illness, her entries were short and full of lamentations. The third section is of Clegg. He worries a lot for the illness of Miranda. He takes the temperature and he goes to call a doctor. He waits in the waiting room and feels insecure. He goes to a pharmacy and asks for medicine. He does not help Clegg. Again he had a look at Miranda. At midnight, he goes back to the town to wake a doctor. A policeman frightens him. Clegg is helpless. He is restless, and he wanders around the city to save his love. But Miranda dies. The final section is too short, and Clegg reenters with a new outlook. He is in search of another butterfly of the same social class. He decides that he is responsible for Miranda's death. His fault is kidnapping a girl from different social classes. The collector of butterflies changes as a collector of woman.

PostModernistViews:

The term Postmodern literature is used to describe certain tendencies in post-World War II literature. It is a continuation of the experimentation championed by writers of the modernist period, relying heavily, for example, on fragmentation, paradox, questionable narrators, etc. It is also a reaction against Enlightenment ideas implicit in Modernist literature. The major features of postmodernism are experiment in narrative techniques, form, language, expression, rather than content, social milieu, or psychological characterization.

From the point of view of all the themes and narrative techniques, *The Collector* is striking because its features are not in a coherent account of what happens when Clegg won a large amount of money in the lottery, decides to capture Miranda, a beautiful girl from the neighborhood, and imprison her in the cellar of a countryside house which he managed to buy with the money he had won. The postmodern writers usually do not give a neatly plotted story and a clear ending. They have many diversions. In postmodernism, it is impossible to have a text without intertexts. But the ways in which these intertexts enter the present text need not be conscious to neither author nor reader. Here the reader is presented with two narratives, one by Clegg and one by his victim, Miranda. Clegg's narration is in first person perspective. Miranda narrates all the happenings through her words in diary. We can also find the omniscient narrator in the last chapter.

The collector's mentality can be linked with the postmodern concept of the simulacrum, which was introduced by Jean Baudrillard. The collector values the outward appearances of the objects, more than their intrinsic value. He does not look at the reality but only the simulations which are represented. Butterfly collectors are interested only on their external beauty of certain specimens, and not in their biological function. Miranda effectively characterizes this mentality of Clegg in her diary, "I am one in a 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. He knows that part of my beauty is being alive, but it's the dead me he wants (TC 203)." He confesses of his interests in outward and superficial qualities of his 'object' Miranda, "She smelt so nice I could have stood like that all the evening. It was like being in one of those adverts come to life (TC 82)."

Clegg's mentality is closely linked with the wish, to dominate other people and to have power over them. This is because of the class distinction between Clegg and Miranda. Fowles himself described this book as a commentary on class in England, specifically on class issues such as prosperity, pretension, and the contrasts between the working class and the upper class during the 1950s and 1960s. Clegg wishes to dominate the high class Miranda and these shows the Politics of Representation. He does not understand the mentality and the psychological changes in Miranda. He needs her love alone. He does not bother about her wishes and thoughts. He tries to control her by taking some of her pornographic images. His continuous efforts of justifying what he did, ultimately reveals his egoist motives. His concept of love is structured by his wish to dominate, and it exemplifies the Politics of Representation most obviously. His descriptions do not reveal anything factual about the outside world, but rather tell us something about his psychological make-up and his interests. Miranda as well is subjected to the Politics of Representation by her snobbism. As a product of high class Miranda also tries to dominate Clegg. She represents Clegg only as a half

human being, by calling him as Caliban. As she is aware of Politics of Representation, she is able to recognize the inferiority complex in Clegg. Both Clegg and Miranda represent the basics of Politics of Representation, but the attitudes of both the characters are very different. Some of the themes of *The Collector* represent it as a postmodern novel. The major themes in this novel are class distinction, power and control, photographic images, prison, collecting and art. These themes and techniques clearly depict *The Collector* as a postmodern novel.

Class plays a major role in *The Collector*. The main character, Frederick Clegg, grows up in a lower-class household and only gains access to a great deal of money when he wins the football pools. With his prize of more than 70,000 pounds, he is able to turn his wildest dreams about the beautiful upper-middle-class Miranda into realities. Frederick thinks about the class variations and subversive towards this system of class divisions. The divisions of “FEW” and “MANY” are clearly visible throughout the novel. Frederick lost his father in a car accident, shortly after that his mother also left him. He was brought up by his aunt. As he was not grown up with his biological parents he feels indifferent when he is with the people who had been brought up in the more traditional and nuclear family.

The FEW are the vital, creative, good individuals of society. (i.e) the upper class. While the MANY are the ordinary, dull, and little people who are not ashamed of being dull and little. (i.e) the lower class. Miranda believes she is one among the FEW and includes Frederick with the MANY, despite his wealth. Frederick is feeling subversive about the class system. He tries to destroy and damage the class system. He won a huge amount in the lottery and bought his own house to include himself in the FEW category. His subversive ideas are exhibited in the way he treated Miranda, the so-called upper class category.

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