

Clegg and miranda: love or control?



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Love is a complex concept, one that even ingenious writers have struggled to understand. While scientists confine their understanding of love to ‘chemical reactions’ involving dopamine and serotonin, one cannot deny the qualitative nature that love has. Clegg expresses signs of love throughout the *The Collector* by John Fowles; however, there is more evidence that this a copycat reaction to expected human life rather than true feeling. There is much speculation that Fowles generates regarding Clegg’s mental state, and one cannot deny the sociopathic tendencies that Clegg displays: ‘She didn’t look once at me, but I watched the back of her head and her hair in a long pigtail. It was very pale, silk, like burnet cocoons.’ At first glance, this remark about Miranda’s appearance may appear romantic, even quixotic. However, when one acknowledges the context of the comment, a sense of alarm might arise. Fowles creates an atmosphere of clarity tinged with ironic ambiguity; Clegg’s obsession with Miranda is immediately disclosed even though there is a suspenseful elusiveness about his impending actions. The reader is instantly informed of the peculiarity of Clegg’s personality, as emphasized by his focus on entomology. The simile exaggerates Clegg’s compulsive disposition because he has focused exclusively on comparing Miranda’s characteristics to natural traits. Clegg refrains from describing Miranda’s face, which suggests that he is in love mainly with the idea of being romantically involved with her. This allows him to have control and power, as Miranda has been transformed into an object rather than a person. As Clegg states, describing photographs of Miranda, ‘The best ones were with her face cut off. She didn’t look much anyhow with the gag, of course.’

To some extent, Clegg could harbor true romantic feelings towards Miranda. What may appear as an obsession or dangerous fascination might be mistaken for love. However, one must take into account Clegg's fragile and complex mental state. Fowles creates evidence that provokes the reader to question Clegg's psychological makeup. Therefore, when inquiring as to whether Clegg 'loves' Miranda, one should acknowledge the type of love that is psychologically accessible to Clegg: 'We would be buried together. Like Romeo and Juliet.' Initially, Clegg pursues the romantic option and dismisses any previous reservations he had involving Miranda. This could suggest that Clegg's love for Miranda is strong, as he has overlooked their differences and is determined to join her in the afterlife. This idea is further exaggerated by Fowles' use of short sentences, which enhance Clegg's motivation and finalize his determination. Moreover, while Marian attracts Clegg's attention after the death of Miranda, the two girls' similarities could suggest that Clegg subconsciously desires the return of Miranda: 'For a moment it gave me a turn, I thought I was seeing a ghost, she had the same hair except it was not so long.' On the surface, it may appear that Clegg has insensitively embraced a new romantic interest; however, this shift could alternatively be regarded as an opportunity for his subliminal grief to be cultivated. Describing Marian, he states that 'She isn't as pretty as Miranda, of course, in fact she's only an ordinary common shop-girl.' Clegg places Miranda on a higher pedestal and criticizes Marian's appearance, and the repetition of commas embellishes this and could demonstrate that Miranda is now uncontaminated in Clegg's mind. Therefore, despite Clegg and Miranda's earlier conflicts, Clegg's feelings towards Miranda have morphed back into love because she has returned to the pure and innocent state that

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Clegg formerly worshiped. On the other hand, the question arises as to whether this is truly love, as Miranda must fit Clegg's expectations.

Consequently, when she deviates, Clegg dismisses his affection because she has tarnished his fantasy of flawlessness and virtuousness. Therefore, Clegg has adopted a form of love that is conditional and is superficial because it lacks the parity and selflessness of genuine love.

Clegg does not truly love Miranda, and he is dominated by his desire to psychologically control her. Fowles establishes early on that Clegg is attracted to power, and an epistemological struggle consequently follows: 'It gave me a feeling of power, I don't know why. All those people searching and me knowing the answer.' Clegg's confusion and lack of understanding suggest a degree of haziness that could foreshadow his subsequent psychological demise. This warped state of mind can be further demonstrated when Clegg refuses to save Miranda from death because he is fearful of the authorities discovering the truth. If Clegg's love were genuine, Miranda's health would have overridden his egoistic desire for autonomy. However, the sequences of events are complex and ethically challenging. Clegg's panic, resulting from Miranda's affliction, is a normal response that many individuals could face in a similar situation. As studies have shown, the brain's response to these circumstances results in the sympathetic nerves signalling the adrenal glands to release chemicals such as epinephrine and cortisol, which 'cloud' your thinking. Thus, Clegg's disastrous decision making may not represent his love for Miranda, but instead indicate a natural effect upon an individual under pressure.

On the other hand, Clegg uses aggression and emotional manipulation that suggest that he values power over an authentic relationship with Miranda: ' I don't know what it was, it got me excited, it gave me ideas, seeing her lying there right out. It was like I'd showed who was really the master.' Clegg's revelation of his dark fantasies suggests a complete disregard for Miranda as a person; instead, she becomes an object that Clegg can use for his pleasure. A feminist perspective would maintain that this is a contemporary problem that dominates today's culture, since film and other media frequently glorify the female body in a way that is ultimately cynical and objectifying. Clegg adopts a similar approach by taking photos of Miranda in her vulnerable state. Moreover, he tries to justify his actions, implying that he subconsciously understands the immorality of them: ' About what I did, undressing her...not many would have kept control of themselves, just taken photos, it was almost a point in my favor.' He uses a comparison to other men as evidence that his actions were morally vindicated; however, the purpose of this generalization is to ease his thoughts. Furthermore, he briefly mentions a system of ' points' that supposedly contributes evidence to his argument of moral supremacy. Nonetheless, the word ' almost' shows that his subconscious is struggling with his decision, as he cannot fully exonerate himself.

Clegg thus expresses brief moments of love for Miranda, but these moments are created on his own terms and do not resemble ' true' love. Indeed, Clegg does not truly appreciate Miranda's rights as an individual; he keeps her against her will in hope that she will love him. This is therefore an inner battle that Clegg is struggling with. He is seeking someone to love him so

that he can feel acceptance, as his position in the social system rendered him isolated and lonesome.