

THE INTROVERTED SENSATION TYPE AND REALITY PERCEPTION IN JOHN FOWLES'S *THE MAGUS*

Bianca FOGHEL, PhD Candidate, University of the West, Timișoara

Abstract: The present paper aims to depict the typological portrait of the main protagonist in The Magus, relying upon Jungian analytical psychology in terms of theoretical background. The focus is on analysing Nicholas Urfe's dominant psychological function, which from my point of view corresponds to the introverted sensation psychological type, as outlined by Carl Jung. I shall also explore how in Nicholas's case the physiological sense perception is not coherently complemented by the other cognitive functions, accounting for the fact that the subject becomes increasingly possessed by the projections received from and cast onto the outer world. This rather unilateral means of perception proves to have a decisive impact upon the manner in which the character-narrator takes in the extrinsic reality, resorting to abstract collective stereotypes and patterns.

Keywords: Jungian psychology, unilateral perception, exterior vs interior

John Fowles's acknowledgement of the influence of Jung at the time *The Magus*, John Fowles's first penned novel, the hallmark of his oeuvre due to its recurrent themes, motifs and symbols that echo all the major tenets of his writing was being written. Furthermore, Nicholas Urfe's search for self-awareness triggered the hypothesis according to which the novel, apart from its being widely read as an existentialist Bildungsroman, could be better grasped in the light of a Jungian reading. Fowles fictionalizes his own experience on the Greek island of Spetsai and it seems that what he hopes to attain through his semi-autobiographical fiction is to enwrap personal experiences and perceptions into a certain degree of universality. In several interviews, Fowles admitted to his being strongly influenced by Jungian psychoanalysis "For me Jung has always been the most fruitful psychologist, that is, most fertile in his effects on any subsequent fiction" (Fowles, quoted in Vipond, 1999: 185); "Jung is infinitely more valuable for an artist. One of the Eranos yearbooks (Pantheon Books, 1955) was important for *The Magus*" (Fowles, quoted in Vipond, 1999: 203).

What Nicholas Urfe, the main protagonist and the character-narrator of the novel needs to understand is that reality should not be taken in metaphorically, nor literally but imaginatively, through the lenses of his individuality, not those of aesthetics or physical perception. Which is why soon after having entered the restricted and mystery-ridden domain of Bourani on the island of Spetsai, Greece, where he is to teach English at a public school, Conchis, the embodiment of the mentor image, offers him a parable of the senses that are subsequently concretized into reality. Being committed to generally fictionalizing reality according to his own liking, at Bourani Nicholas will be given various lessons meant to make him reject the immediacy of physicality and to avoid the distorting lenses of aesthetics in his

perception. The first experiences at Bourani seem to be focused on enacting a materialized realization of the narrated events. First, after Conchis mentions her, the gradual appearance of Lily, who overwhelms Nicholas from a sensorial point of view. After the narrative about the Battle of Neuve Chapelle, another sensorial experience is enacted, namely one corresponding to the auditory sense upon hearing “Tipperary,” which “came with a dreamlike slowness, almost as if it was being sung out of the stars and had had to cross all that night and space to reach me” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 21). Next, the olfactory sense, “connected with the singing,” is concretized through the stench of corpses. The visual dimension is also challenged after Nicholas reads the seventeenth-century pamphlet about the murderer Robert Foulkes, who is cast in flesh in front of Nicholas, “a Rembrandt, disturbingly authentic and yet enormously out of place — a heavy, solemn man with a reddish face” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 23).

Nicholas can only grasp Conchis’s narratives if they are reinforced by their materialization since it seems that is only thorough the physical senses that he can internalize the outer world. It is as if the exterior reality needed validation through the filter of the physical senses. Hence it is clear that Nicholas’s dominant psychological function is sensing, which is an irrational function, defined by Jung as “all perceptions by means of the sense organs” (Jung, *CW* vol. 7, par. 518). The secondary function is necessarily a rational one, since “experience shows that the secondary function is always one whose nature is different from, though not antagonistic to, the leading function” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 515). Therefore, we might conclude that in Nicholas’s case thinking is above feeling, since his cognitive processes revolve around rationalizing metaphors and interpreting reality, thus thinking and conceptualizing prevail. Awareness and analysis of the cognitive processes can be recognized as the protagonist’s overarching strategy in representing the self: he is constantly analyzing his perceptive responses to extrinsic and intrinsic stimuli, as a poet and self-proclaimed advocate of aesthetics and as a sensualist. However, it is not the analysis and description of perceptive responses that Nicholas fails at, it is a different kind of awareness, namely self-awareness, which has been described in connection with John Fowles’s fiction as “the goal of life experience and formal education. It is the end toward which all of his protagonists grope” (Olshen, 1978: 12). What Nicholas needs to learn during the Bourani experience is to switch from the perception of the self gained solely through glimpses projected by and onto the outer world to an authentic and holistic perception aided by taking in reality and filtering it through his own individuality, in other words, he needs to stop defining himself through projections and start working on attaining a certain degree of self-awareness, a quest all Fowlesian characters undergo one way or another.

This having been said, we may affirm that, in Nicholas’s case, feeling, “a function of subjective evaluation” (Jung, *CW* vol. 7, par. 518), is downgraded to a tertiary function. Intuition, “perception by way of the unconscious, or perception of unconscious events” (Jung, *CW* vol. 7, par. 518), the opposite of sensing, is the inferior psychological function, namely least employed by Nicholas, who relies mainly, if not exclusively, upon his senses when perceiving and internalizing the

surrounding reality. It has been argued that if sensation is the primary function of an individual, which is clearly the case with Nicholas who takes in reality exclusively by filtering it through the senses, intuition cannot possibly operate as a secondary function and is relegated deep into the realm of the unconscious. This is due to the fact that “the effective operation of sensation demands that it focus on sense perceptions in the outer world,” while intuition “‘senses’ what is happening in the inner world” (Sharp, 1987: 20). Blinded by the intensity of the seemingly accurate representations of reality offered solely by the senses, Nicholas cannot find a means of reaching out to the inner world and thus fails to take in reality holistically, experience which is only possible if the four psychological functions would be employed complementarily. Naturally, employing all four functions complementarily or even alternatively over a relatively short period of time is not something feasible: “Experience shows that it is practically impossible, owing to adverse circumstances in general, for anyone to develop all his psychological functions simultaneously” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, par. 763). The compensatory function of the psyche dictates that the more a function is repressed, the more it shall dominate the unconscious; in other words, the function we are least aware of using when perceiving the reality of the outer world, is the one most employed by the unconscious as a mechanism of expression. With concern to how compensation works at the level of cognitive functions, Jung states that

In so far then as every man, as a relatively stable being, possesses all the basic psychological functions, it would be a psychological necessity with a view to perfect adaptation that he should also employ them in equal measure. For there must be a reason why there are different ways of psychological adaptation: evidently one alone is not sufficient, since the object seems to be only partially comprehended when; [...] from this deficiency a derangement of adaptation develops. (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 28)

The first distinction Jung makes in the work that extensively touches upon the classification of psychological distinctions within the human nature, *Psychological Types*, is that between the extravert and the introvert, both being referred to as attitudes of the consciousness. This distinction is mainly characterized by the subject’s relation to the object, namely, if the object is the subject’s centre of gravitation and all perceptive faculties move from the object towards the subject, we are dealing with an extraverted personality which is oriented towards the extrinsic objective reality of events and people, whom the extravert is dependent upon in terms of identity-construction. This outward flowing direction of psychic energy is opposed to an inward flowing of the libido, where the subject represents its own centre, being the axis around which perception and psychological functions revolve, the personality in question being that of an introvert. The introvert attitude is oriented towards the intrinsic world of subjective processes. One of these attitudes is invariably dominant within the consciousness, which means that the underdeveloped repressed attitude will dominate the unconscious. Jung also points out that the prevalent attitude may alternate with the repressed one within the natural course of

life, which also applies to the cognitive functions one uses to gather perceptions of the world.

My contention is that Nicholas embodies the introverted stance, taking into account the features Jung mentions in *Psychological Types*; this attitude is depicted as one that sets “the self and the subjective psychological process above the object and the objective process” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 12), which results in the object representing “merely an outward objective token of a subjective content, the embodiment of an idea” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 12). Therefore, according to Jung, the introverted type places greater emphasis on the subjective perception, while the object that generates the respective perception remains a less valuable aspect, something always ranking second, if not a downright also-ran in the process of internalizing the outer world of reality. In other words, the interiorized experience is more pregnant than the “object in its own individuality” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 12). It is immediately obvious that Nicholas places foremost emphasis on the highly subjective perception of the outer reality, the object or objects generating the respective perception being of secondary importance, even when they are human beings, who end up objectified in order to deliver the projections and subjective perceptions the introvert ravenously feeds on. What truly matters to him is ‘collecting,’ i.e. internalizing everything that is amassed from the exterior world (‘introjection’) and further projecting the gathered perceptions onto an object that is suitable, regardless of the object in itself.

Given the theoretical aspects mentioned above, we may firmly conclude that in terms of Jungian analytical psychology, Nicholas Urfe evinces the psychological direction corresponding to the introverted sensation type: “This type, therefore, is uncommonly inaccessible to an objective understanding; and he fares no better in the understanding of himself” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 504). In order to be able to apprehend reality and the self as totality, Nicholas needs to complement the attitude of the sensualist, an attitude that can only offer him fragmentary glimpses. Not only does the overuse of senses in the perception of the exterior reality convey a highly biased image, it also distorts it, to the detriment of an objective perception of reality, in which one actually lives instead of overanalysing and over-interpreting the mechanisms of life.

Jung points out that the introverted sensation type “conveys an image whose effect is not so much to reproduce the object as to throw over it a wrapping whose lustre is derived from age-old subjective experience” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 501). As is the case with Nicholas, the introverted sensation type is the slave of the embellishing metaphor, of the ideal and of the ceaseless quest for meaning: “mere sense impression develops into the depth of the meaningful” (Jung, *CW* vol. 6, p. 501). When physical sense perception is not coherently complemented by the other cognitive functions, the subject becomes possessed by the projections received from and cast onto the outer world, without being able to comprehend and live it holistically. Nicholas is also limited to perceptive fragments he gathers and idealizes in connection with the experience at Bourani, the outer world of reality gradually

losing ground to the point that returning to it during the weekdays becomes a terrible nuisance.

Nicholas strongly identifies himself with the self-proclaimed persona of the sensualist and correspondingly reacts according to precepts that echo the Jungian introverted sensation type. He shuns objective reality and readily confines himself to the realm of subjective sense perceptions. This perception of the outer reality as a somewhat illusory realm of idyllic images dominates Nicholas's consciousness altogether, and he relates to reality as if it were a private dimension of mythology and fantasy, much like his perception of Bourani and of the Greek landscape. This association of reality with an illusory mythological realm is repeatedly illustrated in the novel, for instance, upon first arriving in Greece, reality seems to Nicholas "some dimension for which there is no name" (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 7). Especially the landscape of the island is connected with this sense of distance from reality and with Nicholas's habit of internalizing pre-fabricated ideals: "I had fallen in love with the picture long before I saw the reality" (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 7) and "The whole island seemed to feel this exile from contemporary reality" (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 8). As previously discussed, the island symbolically stands for the unconscious realm, which accounts for the fact that the more Nicholas ventures deeper into the island, the more distant objective reality becomes, being replaced by a heterogeneous collage made up of an imagery of fantasy and mythological references, corresponding to the collective unconscious material; upon leaving Bourani, Nicholas claims that

In a sense I reentered reality as I walked. The events of the weekend seemed to recede, to become locked away, as if I had dreamt them; and yet as I walked I had the strangest feeling, compounded of the early hour, the absolute solitude, and what had happened, of having entered a myth; [...] I could not describe it. It was not in the least a literary feeling, but an intensely mysterious present and concrete feeling of excitement, of being in a situation where anything still might happen. As if the world had suddenly, during those last three days, changed from being the discovered to the still undiscovered. (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 25).

In accordance with his propensity towards taking in the outer world exclusively through the senses, Nicholas takes the visual dimension of the Bonnard painting for a comprehensive reality: "I thought of the Bonnard; that was the reality; such moments; not what one could tell" (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 15). What is further relevant in this line of thought is the reaction Nicholas has to Conchis's statement of allegedly having "lived a great deal in other centuries" (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 17) to which Nicholas replies "in literature," being curtly contradicted by Conchis: "in reality." This abrupt discussion is continued in the narrative, reaching a climax when Conchis nonchalantly reveals to a perplexed Nicholas that he travels to other worlds. Resorting solely to physical senses for gaining a perception of the world, Nicholas demands evidence of the extramundane journey, which he considers to have been

made “in the flesh” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 17), being yet unable to grasp that there are other deeper and subtler dimensions that converge into the construction of reality. It seems that throughout the novel Nicholas occasionally lapses into a certain degree of solipsism that is aided first of all by his introverted attitude, which dictates the investment of personal energy, of the libido, strictly into the ego, eventually depriving the outer world of the power to exert influence upon the respective individual. Secondly, Nicholas’s solipsism is fostered by the identification of his ego-consciousness with the persona of the sensualist, one-sidedly resorting to physical senses when relating to what is outside of his ego. Nicholas’s idealizing subjective perception of the objects from the external world overlaps with the image of the object, making it impossible for him to discern between reality and ideal. His psychological processes seem to be focusing exclusively upon keeping the dimension of objective reality at a distance, in order not to contradict his idealized expectations. This is how the introverted sensation type is habituated to turning the images univocally amassed by the physical senses into complete alienation from the realm of reality. Sharp (1987: 11) explains how, according to Jungian analytical psychology, the univocal use of the primary function generates a compensatory outburst in the inferior function, which occurs at the level of the unconscious, unleashing an additional imagery pertaining to the world of unconscious fantasies. This natural compensation reverberates, giving rise to intense emotional responses, which Nicholas only too often evinces throughout the novel, especially in relation to Conchis’s oral narratives: he constantly has the feeling that “something was trying to slip between me and reality,” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 18).

In this line of thought, we should not overlook the episode when Conchis takes Nicholas by boat to the islet of Petrocaravi, dubbed the “ship of stone,” and lures an octopus out of its hiding place, slashing it open with a knife; apparently, as Conchis observes, another octopus shall move the same night into the same hiding place, being liable to a similar brutal death. Nicholas then receives a shrewd self-portrait in connection with the episode: “You notice reality is not necessary. Even the octopus prefers the ideal” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 22). Nicholas appears thus as the gullible octopus that does not see reality deeper than the surface and than mere semblance. What is particularly interesting is that Nicholas and perhaps the reader as well perceives the episode as yet another of Conchis’s narratives. Since the episode echoes the structure of the previous narratives, including an implicit morale, it is almost as if the polymath had narrated the episode, instead of actually enacting it in front of Nicholas’s eyes, which makes him think of Conchis’s earlier narratives of the Maine, of Neuve Chapelle; he also remembers “it was Sunday morning; the time for sermons and parables” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 22). My contention is that Conchis’s intention, similar to that of the author himself, is, again, to blot out the boundaries between reality and personal perception, in order for Nicholas and for the reader to come to question what we are socially instilled to believe is our reality. Reality cannot be narrated, it cannot be grasped solely through the prism of physical perception, acquired generalities and stereotypes: “I do not ask you to believe. All I

ask you is to pretend to believe. Just pretend to believe. It will be easier” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 22).

Similarly noteworthy in this line of thought that follows Nicholas through the maze of collective reality and self-made fictional representations is the chapter in which Conchis recounts his experience connected to war and the Society of Reason, which shares certain features with the group Nicholas used to attend, Les Hommes Révoltés. Conchis bitterly concludes, as shall Nicholas in connection to Les Hommes Révoltés, that considering the events prior to 1920, the Society of Reason seemed nothing more than a “pathetic” fallacy since “words had lost their power, either for good or for evil; still hung, like a mist, over the reality of action, distorting, misleading, castrating; [...] a mist, a flimsy superstructure” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 30). The idea put across by Conchis is that words and fiction offer merely a ready-made version of reality, as Nicholas seems to obstinately assert through his willingness to take fiction for reality and vice versa. Reality and reason are indeed superstructures but they are empty and meaningless if not aided by the creativity and discernment of individuality, which is what Nicholas needs to learn until the end of the Godgame. Narrating and illustrating the reality of war is Conchis’s way of convincing Nicholas that no collective reality is above personal reality, especially when abstract stereotypical ideals are superimposed on individuality.

However, Nicholas once again resorts to employing the physical senses when taking in the exterior reality: “I listened to the house and the night outside. Silence; [...] Once again, the cheap browning paper and the old-fashioned type showed it to be unmistakably a genuine prewar relic” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 30). Nicholas’s habit of gullibly taking for granted everything that appeals to his senses is once again asserted. Furthermore, he is constantly craving incentives for his senses since, towards the end of the same chapter, he comments on an irritated tone: “meanwhile, the masque was letting me down. Silence still reigned” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 30). He cannot realize the fact that the experience at Bourani is not meant to satisfy his solipsistic needs, but the yet undiscovered human need of harmonizing the ego-consciousness with the unconscious.

It is perhaps interesting to point out that throughout the novel there is a constant interplay between ideal and reality. Nicholas continuously mistakes archetypal ideals for a personal reality, which is why he cannot discern between collective and individual, closely adhering to a self-fabricated facet. Nicholas’s ideal of femininity is also perceived through the looking-glass of the senses, namely, when Lily approaches him in the forest at a certain point, as he was eagerly awaiting “anything that Conchis might now offer” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 33), she first appeals to his auditory, olfactory, tactile and visual senses before eventually emerging as a total entity, an entity that, in fact, pertains to an ideal reality, perhaps closer to the realm of fantasy than that of objective reality:

I was given no time to sleep. I had not been lying there five minutes before *I heard a rustle* and, simultaneously, *smelt* the sandalwood perfume. I pretended to be asleep. The rustle came closer. *I heard the tiny*

crepitation of pine needles. Her feet were just behind my head. There was a *louder rustle*; she had sat down, and very close behind me. I thought she would drop a cone, *tickle* my nose. But in a very *low voice* she began to *recite*, half *singing*. (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 33, my emphases).

Furthermore when referring to Lily, he inevitably employs the visual in order to be able to describe her, as if he were trying to objectify her so as to correspond to the prefabricated ideal of femininity: “I *looked* at the nape of her neck, her slim shoulders, her total reality” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 33, my emphasis). He is not interested in what Lily represents as a comprehensive being and the way Nicholas probes the reality of Lily is unsurprisingly through one of the senses, namely touch “‘you're as physically real as I am.’ I pinched her arm, and she winced.” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 33).

This is how the author constructs Nicholas as the introverted sensation type, who cannot establish a clear-cut relation with reality, except when receiving intense physiological stimuli. In order to turn the stimuli into a form of reality, which he strives to fit into patterns, more and more vivid and realistic, he craves an intense physiological imagery, which the Godgame lavishly provides in the form of mythical and universal representations meant to eventually disenchant him from the uniformity of the stereotypical and to bring him closer to the genuineness of individuality.

Nicholas eventually attempts to explain to Lily that the masque is beginning to affect his sense of personal reality, which he compares to gravity: “‘You're wonderful... you've no idea how strange this experience has been. I mean, beautifully strange. Only, you know, it's one's sense of reality. It's like gravity. One can resist it only so long’” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 33). “Beautifully strange” is another descriptive representation of his highly sensorial reality perception, which needs to receive the imprint of his individuality as a totality, not as fragmentary physical patterns fed into the consciousness exclusively through the senses.

To round up the idea that Nicholas corresponds to the introverted sensation psychological type considering his perception of the extrinsic as well as the intrinsic dimension of reality, I shall emphasize what Conchis tells Nicholas, namely that “verification is the only scientific criterion of reality. That does not mean that there may not be realities that are unverifiable” (Fowles, 2004: Chapter 36). The “unverifiable realities” showcased by Conchis within the Bourani masque through the meta-narrative, the psychological and the mythical elements recurrently employed are meant to aid Nicholas in realizing that he should cease his continuous attempts at authenticating his perception of reality solely through the tangibility of the senses.

Bibliography

Fowles, John. 2004. *The Magus*. London: Vintage. Kindle edition.

Jung, C. G. 1917, 1928. [*Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*](#). In H. Read et al. (Series Eds.), *The Collected Works of C.G. Jung* (vol. 7). New York: Pantheon.

Jung, C. G. 1953-1966. *The collected works of C.G. Jung* (H. Read et al., Eds.). New York: Pantheon.

Jung, C. G., & Hull, R. F. C. (1991). *Psychological Types* (a revised ed.). London: Routledge.

Olshen, Barry. 1978. *John Fowles*. New York: Frederik Ungar Publishing Co.

Sharp, Daryl. 1987. *Personality Types. Jung's Model of Typology*. Toronto: Thistle Printing Company Ltd.

Vipond, Dianne L. 1999. *Conversations with John Fowles*. Jackson: University Press of Mississippi.