

6. The Subjective Gaze and Fictional Reality: A Jungian Reading of *The Magus*

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Abstract: This paper examines how John Fowles's *The Magus* constructs "fictional reality" through the protagonist's subjective gaze, interpreted via Carl Jung's typology of introverted sensation. During his identification with the persona of the artist, Nicholas Urfe perceives Greece, Bourani and the figures around him not as autonomous realities but as extensions of his own metaphorical projections. Objective stimuli are diminished to triggers for preexisting images, producing a psychic mirror world in which Nicholas's aesthetic expectations eclipse the world in its own right. Conchis's orchestrated masque exposes and destabilizes this perceptual stance by confronting Nicholas with sensorial experiences that blur the border between representation and fact, revealing his tendency to mistake symbolic constructs for lived reality. By tracing how Nicholas's dominant sensing function, supported by rationalizing thought and deprived of intuition, generates a fictionalized version of reality, the paper shows how *The Magus* stages the dangers of a gaze governed by collective images rather than individual experience. Read through a Jungian lens, the novel illuminates the philosophical stakes of fictional reality as both a defensive strategy and a perceptual limitation, suggesting that genuine encounter with self and world becomes possible only when the subjective gaze loosens its hold on metaphor and projection.

Keywords: subjective gaze, introverted sensation, analytical psychology, collective unconscious

Reality Perception as Object Assimilation

John Fowles's *The Magus* frames reality as a problem of perception rather than of truth. This paper approaches the novel through Jung's concept of introverted sensation, arguing that Nicholas Urfe's subjective gaze transforms experience into a form of fictional reality governed by metaphor, projection, and inherited symbolic images. Identified with the

artist persona, Nicholas perceives Greece, others, and events not as autonomous realities but as mirrors of his inner expectations, confusing symbolic constructs with lived experience. Bourani intensifies and exposes this disposition by staging encounters that exploit his reliance on sensorial vividness and narrative coherence. Read in this light, *The Magus* reveals fictional reality as a perceptual limitation that must be disrupted before a genuine encounter between the self and the world becomes possible.

Regressive Restoration and the Sensualist Persona

Regressive restoration designates the negative reactivation of the persona archetype following a disruption at the level of consciousness. In Nicholas Urfe's case, this disruption occurs when he realizes that his literary vocation was illusory. The collapse of the poet–artist persona deprives him of the metaphorical lens through which he had previously mediated reality, leaving him with a narrowed perceptual repertoire. In its place emerges a regressively restored persona: that of the sensualist, whose primary mode of relating to the world is through possession and sensory immediacy.

This restoration entails a corresponding shift in psychological type. Nicholas abandons metaphorical projection and resorts almost exclusively to sensation, seeking to internalize reality as a source of intense stimuli. Jung emphasizes that such regressions are accompanied by a deterioration of reality-perception, as the reconstructed persona attempts to exclude the unconscious altogether. The extraverted sensation type, oriented toward the object as a source of stimulation, thereby diminishes the imprint of individuality required for personal development, attempting, as Jung notes, “to forget if possible that one has an unconscious at all”.¹

The transition from introverted to extraverted sensation is precipitated by Nicholas's recognition that rendering internal impressions through art no longer provides a viable means of relating to the world. Whereas the introverted sensation type projects subjective impressions through metaphor, extraverted sensation seeks to seize reality directly, valuing objects only insofar as they yield fresh sensations. Experience

¹ Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1966), par. 179.

thus becomes instrumentalized, and reality is habitually objectified in order to be made “possessable.”²

Although physical sensation remains Nicholas’s dominant cognitive function throughout both identifications, the crucial distinction lies in how sensory data are processed. Introverted sensation filters perception through subjective imagery, while extraverted sensation reflects the object with apparent realism. As Sharp observes, introversion renders “the impression made by the object on the subject,” whereas extraversion produces “a realistic reflection of the object.”³ Consequently, Nicholas’s relationship to Greece evolves from aesthetic admiration to possessive attachment, a shift epitomized by his resentment at the loss of solitude on the island’s southern shore, which he had come to regard as “my secret province and no one else’s” full stop on the inside of the apostrophes.⁴

Sensory Immediacy, Fragmentation, and the Cage of Perception

With the dissolution of the poet persona, reality is no longer externalized through contemplative description but internalized through sensory absorption. Greece, once idealized, now appears anonymous, mirroring Nicholas’s recognition of his own existential anonymity. The episode of the distant song during his suicide attempt marks a crucial moment in this transformation. The song arrests his aestheticized self-destruction through sheer sensory presence, exposing the inadequacy of poetic literalization and drawing him back into physical immediacy. The synesthetic imagery that follows reflects Nicholas’s attempt to compensate for his one-sided perception by intensifying sensory input rather than integrating undifferentiated cognitive functions.

The recollection of the *gabbia*, the self-constructed cage of illusion, encapsulates this predicament. As Conradi notes, it prefigures the magical enclosure of Bourani, symbolizing a perceptual imprisonment sustained by self-delusion. For the extraverted sensation type, this inward flow of psychic energy isolates the self within the object-world, impairing individuality by replacing authentic encounter with posses-

² Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1971), par. 606.

³ Daryl Sharp, *Personality Types: Jung’s Model of Typology* (Toronto: Thistle Printing Company Ltd., 1987), 80.

⁴ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 67.

sion. Whether projecting idealized images or introjecting sensory reflections, Nicholas remains trapped in a univocal relation to reality that fragments perception and forecloses genuine individuation.

The aforementioned attitudes are illustrated at the narrative level through the protagonist's attitude towards Greece and towards feminine alterity. Since Alison embodies straightforwardness and the reality Nicholas seeks to distance himself from as dictated by the persona of the poet artist, he cannot project his idealizing impulses upon her; thereby seeking a more abstract, mythical entity that would respond to and better accommodate his projections. Just before the futility of his literary efforts dawns upon him, Nicholas Urfe cold-bloodedly acknowledges that "I wanted to hurt her [Alison]." ⁵ His rage against everything Alison stands for is justified through her inability to conform to Nicholas's idealizing constraints. He must thus dig deeper for a more appropriate medium onto which he can project his idealistic impressions. The first such entity appears, as discussed in the previous chapter, upon his first contact with Greece, when Nicholas resorts to a purely metaphorical discourse in rendering the outer world, sacrificing lived experience to contemplative description: "all pure, all noble, luminous, immense, all as it always had been" and "It was like a journey into space. I was standing on Mars, knee-deep in thyme, under a sky that seemed never to have known dust or cloud." ⁶ The recurrent comparison between Greece and a Circe-like feminine entity foreshadows the fundamentals of his relationship with Lily/Julie:

I fell head over heels, totally and forever in love with the Greek landscape from the moment I arrived. But with the love came a contradictory, almost irritating, feeling of impotence and inferiority, as if Greece were a woman so sensually provocative that I must fall physically and desperately in love with her, and at the same time so calmly aristocratic that I should never be able to approach her. ⁷

We therefore witness how the idealized object undergoes a metamorphosis, gaining corporeality and being literally objectified in order to satisfy Nicholas's sensorial impulses and his need to possess it. How-

⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁶ Ibid., 49.

⁷ Ibid., 49.

ever, as Neary argued, Nicholas “now encounters something that he cannot possess, cannot literalize,” despite his efforts.⁸ Neary goes on explaining that Nicholas “falls in love with a woman, but it is only a metaphorical woman, and the metaphor refuses to accommodate itself to literal explication.”⁹ Interestingly, upon first meeting Lily, the character-narrator too eagerly acknowledges his own background to be able to have a sense of familiarity and therefore control over the female protagonist’s individuality, who will soon prove to be quite the opposite of anything definable and familiar. As he first hears her speak, he comments: “It was very largely my own – product of boarding school, university, the accent of what a sociologist once called the Dominant Hundred Thousand.”¹⁰ Nicholas’s constant shift between metaphorizing and literalizing the phenomenal reality as well as otherness, reveals his dedication to following collective principles and categorizations. He projects and seeks to possess, to introject, collective ideals that have nothing to do with individuality and are situated at the opposite of authenticity.

Carl G. Jung also explains this unnatural personification of the environment through the excessive identification between ego-consciousness and persona, and this sort of identification triggers the intrusion of the anima into the conscious world:

To the degree that the ego identifies with the persona, the anima, like everything unconscious, is projected into the real objects of our environment. She is regularly to be found, therefore, in the woman we are in love with [...]. They are projected upon more distant objects, from which no immediate disturbance is to be feared. But the more sensitive a person is, the closer these daemonic projections will come.¹¹

⁸ John Neary, *Something and Nothingness: The Fiction of John Updike and John Fowles* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992), 130.

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 168.

¹¹ Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1966), par. 508.

Projection, Possession, and the Anima

Jung notes that consciousness is simultaneously drawn toward the unconscious and resistant to it, fearing the dissolution of its conscious ideals.¹² This tension is central to Nicholas Urfe's perceptual oscillation. As an introverted sensation type, Nicholas initially responds only to objects that can sustain his idealizing projections, most notably Greece, which functions as a metaphorical extension of his inner world. With the dissolution of the artist persona, this mechanism is inverted rather than resolved. Nicholas now responds exclusively to an idealized reality that can be objectified and possessed. Lily, or Julie, emerges as the embodied counterpart of Greece, assimilated as an anima projection and valued primarily as a carrier of idealized stimuli rather than as an autonomous subject.

Conchis's pseudo-autobiographical narratives are designed to confront Nicholas with this egotistic pattern of perception. The story of Count Alphonse de Deukans offers the most explicit parallel. Deukans, described as a "collector of collections," inhabits a castle that resembles a museum of curated objects, mirroring Bourani's theatrical environment. The analogy is made explicit when Nicholas recognizes that Conchis has attempted to turn Bourani into such a gallery, reducing human beings to manipulable figures.¹³ The narrative thus stages a *mise en abyme* in which Bourani, Givray-le-Duc, and the novel itself reflect one another as artificial worlds that imitate life while evacuating it of lived immediacy.

The symmetry between Deukans, Conchis, and Nicholas is reinforced by their shared age and by Conchis's admission of his own inability to judge Deukans at "the most difficult and irritating age of all."¹⁴ This recursive structure exposes Nicholas's enchantment with representation itself, revealing his fascination with self-reflexive systems that substitute aesthetic control for ethical engagement. Both Bourani and Givray-le-Duc function as closed circuits of meaning, presenting life as an endlessly reproducible spectacle devoid of a factual or moral core.

The Collector Mentality and Sensation as Knowledge

With the abandonment of the poet persona, Nicholas gravitates toward a new identification: that of the adventure-seeking sensualist. This shift is

¹² Ibid., par. 509-510.

¹³ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 322.

¹⁴ Ibid., 179.

mirrored by Conchis's self-presentation as an *homme sensual* and finds its theoretical articulation in what Onega describes as the "phase of the collector," attained when reality is apprehended solely through the senses.¹⁵ Nicholas's accumulation of sexual encounters parallels his accumulation of experiences, both driven by a desire for novelty and intensity rather than relation or understanding. Similarly, Deukans "collected in order to collect", exemplifying a mode of existence emptied of purpose beyond acquisition.¹⁶

For Fowles, collecting is ethically corrosive because it replaces engagement with possession and reduces reality to a reservoir of consumable fragments. This tendency recurs across his fiction, from Frederick Clegg's captivity of Miranda to Charles Smithson's fossil obsession, both of which illustrate the substitution of control for encounter. In each case, the persona adopted conforms to collective patterns rather than expressing individuality, reinforcing Jung's observation that sensation "creates ties to the object" and ultimately pulls the subject into it.¹⁷

The archetypal force behind such a dynamic lies in projection. Jung emphasizes that archetypes possess autonomy and can seize the subject with compelling intensity, as in the phenomenon of falling in love at first sight.¹⁸ Conchis repeatedly warns Nicholas against this mechanism, noting that collecting extinguishes moral judgment and that the object eventually possesses the possessor.¹⁹ Nicholas himself acknowledges this inversion when he admits to being haunted by the entire Bourani experience rather than by Lily alone.²⁰ In Jungian terms, the one-sidedness of consciousness forces the unconscious into open opposition, a conflict allegorized by the Godgame itself.²¹

The extraverted sensation type is marked by a univocal mode of

¹⁵ Susana Onega, *Form and Meaning in the Novels of John Fowles* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1989), 94.

¹⁶ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 177.

¹⁷ Carl G. Jung, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1966), par. 119.

¹⁸ Richard I. Evans, *Conversations with Carl Jung and Reactions from Ernest Jones* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964), 51.

¹⁹ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 178.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 270.

²¹ Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1971), par. 608.

perception that privileges immediate enjoyment over ethical or reflective engagement. Sensation becomes both the means and the end of experience, resulting in chronic dissatisfaction and escalating demands for intensity. Jung characterizes this trajectory as one that leads either to crude hedonism or to an effete aestheticism, both of which drain the object of intrinsic value.²² Sharp similarly observes that when the pursuit of sensation becomes all-consuming, the object is ruthlessly exploited.²³

Despite Nicholas's ostensible allegiance to rationalism, his behavior reveals an enslavement to sensation-producing objects that frequently bear little correspondence to reality. Reality itself is reduced to a stimulus for pleasure, and ethical considerations are subordinated to immediate gratification.²⁴ This distortion is most evident in Nicholas's treatment of women, who are perceived not as persons but as embodiments of collective ideals of femininity. Lily de Seitas explicitly names this pattern when she describes Nicholas as an unscrupulous collector who desires a painting he intends to own at any cost.²⁵

The automaton Mirabelle at Givray-le-Duc crystallizes this logic. As a mechanical surrogate for femininity, she embodies the lethal consequences of idealization divorced from individuality. Critics have noted that Mirabelle exposes the monstrosity underlying controlled erotic fantasy, turning desire back upon itself as symbolic self-destruction.²⁶ Through such images, *The Magus* reveals how fictional reality emerges when perception is governed exclusively by sensation and collective templates, foreclosing the possibility of authentic encounter.

Idealization, Possession, and the Reversed Pygmalion

The consequences of turning the object of his desire into an ideal that has nothing to do with individuality are comparable to the pathology of a reversed Pygmalion syndrome: instead of enlivening the idealized object, Nicholas devitalizes it through his exclusively pleasure-seeking behavior. The constant need to possess the sensation-providing object is also re-

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Daryl Sharp, *Personality Types: Jung's Model of Typology* (Toronto: Thistle Printing Company Ltd., 1987), 56-57.

²⁴ Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1971), par. 606.

²⁵ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 601.

²⁶ Pamela Cooper, *The Fictions of John Fowles: Power, Creativity, Femininity* (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1991), 92.

called in the repression of the undifferentiated function, in Nicholas's case – intuition: “the repressed intuitions begin to assert themselves in the form of projections upon the object,” giving rise to “the wildest suspicions [...]”; if the object is a sexual one, jealous fantasies and anxiety states gain the upper hand.”²⁷ These manifestations can be clearly observed in connection with his attitude towards Lily, whom he constantly needs to have within reach, to possess both physically and mentally, and even in connection to his egotistic attitude towards Greece, feeling “irrationally jealous of all these other people who had appeared from nowhere to poach in ‘my’ territory.”²⁸ This is why, in order to become aware of his objectifying and sensuous-seeking attitude, Nicholas is eventually forced to leave Greece behind, but not before watching Joe literally possess Julie, an act that is meant to make Nicholas relinquish his grip on her.

The correspondence between the relationships de Deukans – Conchis and Conchis – Nicholas having been created and reinforced through the phrase *homme sensual* by which Conchis refers to himself and which faithfully describes Nicholas as well, it becomes clear that Mirabelle, “the symbol of woman's ultimate reification into a phallocratic fantasy”, stands for Nicholas's rather onanistic and objectifying attitude to women;²⁹ this behaviour is made explicit from the first chapters of the novel and consolidated in the episode in which Nicholas, being alone on Moutsa beach, makes “love to the memory of Alison, like an animal, without guilt or shame, *a mere machine for sensation*.”³⁰ His self-indulging sensuousness is further highlighted by the fact that Moutsa, as revealed by Conchis, means ‘snout’, bearing a stylistic reference relevant to our perspective since the snout includes the mouth and the nose of an animal, directly hinting at the sense organs Nicholas Urfe uses univocally in his relationship to reality and alterity, hindering him from achieving a sense of balance between conscious and unconscious, between a degree of social adaptation and, at the same time, of individual authenticity.³¹

In accordance with his propensity towards taking in the outer world exclusively through the senses, Nicholas takes the visual dimen-

²⁷ Carl G. Jung, *Psychological Types*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 6 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, ed. H. Read et al. (London: Routledge, 1971), par. 608.

²⁸ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 184.

²⁹ Roula Ikonomakis, *Post-War British Fiction as Metaphysical Ethnography* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008), 247.

³⁰ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 77.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 83.

sion of a Bonnard painting for a comprehensive reality: “I thought of the Bonnard; that was the reality; such moments; not what one could tell.”³² Carl G. Jung insisted that a “symbolic process is an experience in images and of images” but this implies an acknowledgement of the symbolic dimension of reality, which cannot be literalized or concretized in any way since a symbol refers to an unknown dimension of the surrounding and the intrinsic reality; for everything else that is familiar to a certain extent there are the signs and metaphors.³³

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” to which Nicholas replies “in literature,” being curtly contradicted by Conchis: “in reality.”³⁴ 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. Being devoted 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”, being yet unable to grasp that there are other deeper and subtler dimensions that converge into the construction of reality and of identity.³⁵

Solipsism, Compensation, and the Return of the Unconscious

It seems that throughout the novel Nicholas occasionally lapses into a certain degree of solipsism that 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 him. 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 everything that is outside of his ego-consciousness. Furthermore, Sharp explains how, according to Jungian analytical psychology, the sole use of the primary function generates a fulminant compensatory outburst in the inferior function, which occurs at the level of the unconscious contents, unleashing an additional imagery pertaining to the

³² Ibid., 99.

³³ Carl G. Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, Vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung* (London: Routledge, 1960), par. 82.

³⁴ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 105.

³⁵ Ibid., 106.

world of unconscious fantasies.³⁶ 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."³⁷

The episode when Conchis takes Nicholas by boat to the islet of Petroraravi, dubbed the "ship of stone," and lures an octopus out of its hiding place, slashing it open with a knife is also relevant; 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."³⁸ Nicholas is thus compared to the gullible octopus that does not see reality beyond the surface and mere semblance. Our background requires us to adopt a hiding place in the form of the persona and what Conchis aims to emphasize is that the persona might indeed provide a perfect camouflage especially when the ego-consciousness identifies itself with it; however, this camouflage is a mere semblance of protection, the self being thus exposed to the dangers of background constraints and uniformity, which in the end may prove to be lethal to the integrity of the self.

What is particularly interesting is that Nicholas and perhaps the reader as well perceive 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."³⁹ It seems that Conchis's intention, similar to that of the author is again to blot out the boundaries between reality and personal perception, so that Nicholas and the reader are able to question what we are socially instilled to believe is our reality. Reality cannot be objectified; it cannot be grasped solely through the prism of physical perception, acquired generalities and stereotypes: "I do not ask you to

³⁶ Daryl Sharp, *Personality Types: Jung's Model of Typology* (Toronto: Thistle Printing Company Ltd., 1987), 11.

³⁷ John Fowles, *The Magus: A Revised Version* (London: Vintage, 2004), 105.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 138.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 137.

believe. All I ask you is to pretend to believe. Just pretend to believe. It will be easier.”⁴⁰ Eventually, Nicholas observes that Conchis “looked like Picasso imitating Ghandi imitating a buccaneer. [...] His even teeth gleamed falsely”, perhaps intuiting the falsity of his own persona, mirrored by Conchis’s constantly shifting masks; especially the buccaneer echoes Nicholas’s assumed persona of the adventurer, while the comparison to Picasso might stand for Nicholas’s propensity towards the intensity offered by the visual dimension, constantly collecting images to quench his craving for sensorial representations.⁴¹

However, since he has not yet rejected the veil of the sensualist persona, he 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.”⁴² 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, for instance, towards the end of the same chapter, when he comments with an irritated tone: “meanwhile, the masque was letting me down. Silence still reigned.”⁴³ Blinded by the mask he is wearing in front of others and even in front of himself, he cannot realize the fact that the experience at Bourani is not meant to satisfy his solipsistic needs, but the yet undiscovered goal of harmonizing the ego-consciousness with the unconscious.

The following chapter reinforces Nicholas’s attachment to the persona of the solipsist, as he describes Alison’s letter as “an intrusion – of *dispensable reality* into pleasure, of now artificial duty into instinct. I couldn’t leave the island.”⁴⁴ He becomes more and more possessed by the forces of the unconscious symbolized by the island and vividly represented within Conchis’s masque but he needs to gradually shift from the universality of the collective unconscious towards the individual unconscious, meaning he is bound to reject the falsity of the facade and become authentic in terms of individuality.

With regard to the intricate relation between the persona and anima

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid., 139.

⁴² Ibid., 190.

⁴³ Ibid., 192.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 202.

archetype and their impact upon the Nicholas's perception of reality, it is perhaps interesting to point out that there is a constant interplay between ideal and reality throughout the novel. Nicholas continuously objectifies archetypal ideals into a personal reality, which is why he cannot discern between collective and individual, closely adhering to a self-fabricated facet in the form of the persona archetype. Being hooked on the persona of the sensualist, Nicholas's anima ideal is also perceived through the looking-glass of the senses, for instance, when Lily approaches him in the forest at a certain point, as he was eagerly awaiting "anything that Conchis might now offer" she first appeals to his auditory, olfactory, tactile and visual senses before eventually emerging as a total entity, an entity that is in fact a materialization of an ideal reality, perhaps closer to the realm of fantasy than that of objective reality:

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 was? very close behind me. I thought she would drop a cone, *tick*le my nose. But in a very *low voice* she began to *recite*, Shakespeare.⁴⁵

Visual Objectification and the Limits of Sensory Reality

When referring to Lily, Nicholas privileges the visual dimension, objectifying her in accordance with a prefabricated ideal of femininity: "I looked at the nape of her neck, her slim shoulders, her total reality."⁴⁶ He probes this "total reality" primarily through the senses, especially touch: "'you're as physically real as I am.' I pinched her arm, and she winced."⁴⁷ Lily is valued less as a complete being than as a surface reflecting the features of Nicholas's persona, an aspect that anticipates the discussion of the anima archetype. Attempting to articulate the destabilizing effects of the masque, Nicholas compares his sense of reality to gravity, something one can resist only temporarily.⁴⁸ This metaphor reveals how the unconscious material activated at Bourani disrupts his ex-

⁴⁵ Ibid., 203.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 205.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 208.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 209.

clusively sensorial perception of reality, which lacks the imprint of individuality as a whole. Unwittingly, Nicholas prepares the ground for the dissolution of the persona and the emergence of the shadow, a process initiated by the unconscious itself.

To round up the idea that Nicholas's persona has a direct impact upon his perception of the extrinsic as well as the intrinsic dimension of reality, I shall emphasize what Conchis tells Nicholas in the chapter that illustrates the dissolution of the persona, namely that "verification is the only scientific criterion of reality. That does not mean that there may not be realities that are unverifiable."⁴⁹ Similarly, Carl G. Jung militates for a non-categorizing apprehension, one marked by an input of individuality, as opposed to a purely scientific and factual dissection of the world surrounding us:

When everything is statistical, all individual qualities are wiped out, and that, of course, is quite unbecoming. In fact, it is unhygienic, because if you wipe out the mythology of a man, his entire historical sequence, he becomes a statistical average, a number; that is, he becomes nothing.⁵⁰

The moment Conchis chooses to utter the statement regarding the plurality of realities is also noteworthy since it precedes the hypnosis episode narrated in the same chapter, an episode of crucial importance for the analysis discussing the disintegration of the persona and Nicholas's shift towards his shadow and his own individuality, further away from the enticing patterns of the collective. 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 not continuously attempt to authenticate his perception of reality through tangibility, classifying experiences and feelings according to the general patterns that are invariably part of our unconscious structure but that should not overshadow the individual dimension.

This is how the author constructs Nicholas as the extraverted sensation type, a psychological trait which corresponds to the regressively restored persona of the sensualist, who can only establish a relation with

⁴⁹ Ibid. 235.

⁵⁰ Richard I. Evans, *Conversations with Carl Jung and Reactions from Ernest Jones* (Princeton, NJ: D. Van Nostrand Company, 1964), 111.

reality when receiving intense physiological stimuli. In order to turn the internalized stimuli into a form of reality, which he strives to fit into patterns, more and more vivid and realistic, the extraverted sensation type requires 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.

Fictional Reality and the Limits of the Subjective Gaze

Viewed through a Jungian framework, *The Magus* presents fictional reality not as mere illusion but as a psychic construct generated by a one-sided mode of perception. Nicholas Urfe's development illustrates how the subjective gaze, shaped first by introverted sensation and later by its extraverted counterpart, transforms experience into projection, possession, and aesthetic control. Whether reality is filtered through metaphor or seized through sensory immediacy, it remains subordinated to collective images that obscure individuality and impede authentic relation.

Conchis's masque functions not as an alternative truth but as a deliberate destabilization of Nicholas's perceptual habits. By intensifying both symbolic illusion and sensorial vividness, the Godgame exhausts Nicholas's reliance on representation and tangibility as criteria of reality. The novel thus reveals the ethical consequences of confusing symbolic constructs with lived experience and of reducing others to instruments within the ego's psychic economy. Fictional reality emerges as a defensive strategy that shields consciousness from uncertainty while simultaneously imprisoning it within repetition and stereotype.

At stake in *The Magus* is not the opposition between fiction and reality, but the conditions under which reality becomes possible. Fowles suggests that reality cannot be secured through verification, sensation, or narrative coherence alone. It requires a loosening of the persona and an openness to the destabilizing claims of the unconscious. Only when the subjective gaze relinquishes its hold on projection and possession can reality be encountered as a relational process rather than an object to be mastered. In this sense, *The Magus* ultimately frames individuation as an ethical transformation of perception, in which fictional reality gives way to responsibility, encounter, and the possibility of authenticity.