



Who is David Kepesh? The Persona and the Shadow of the Protagonist of the novel, *The Professor of Desire* by Philip Roth – A Psychoanalytic Study

Author 1: Mr. S. Karthikeyan,

Ph.D. Research Scholar in English, Gobi Arts and Science College,
Gobichettipalayam – 638453, Erode (Dt), Tamilnadu.

Author 2: Dr. P. Karthi,

Associate Professor of English (Aided), Gobi Arts and Science College,
Gobichettipalayam – 638453, Erode (Dt), Tamilnadu.

Abstract:

This paper explores Philip Roth's *The Professor of Desire* through Carl Jung's psychoanalytic concepts of Persona and Shadow. The protagonist, David Kepesh, is a literature professor whose Persona is a carefully maintained public image of intellect and success. However, his hidden Shadow reveals intense sexual desires and fears of failure and guilt. The paper examines how Kepesh's Persona and Shadow conflict, influencing his relationships and career. Through his journey, Kepesh confronts his Shadow, seeking self-awareness and integration of his public and private selves. By analyzing Kepesh's struggles, the paper provides insights into human nature and the psychological tension between our outward appearances and hidden selves, highlighting the importance of acknowledging and accepting both aspects for personal growth and fulfillment.

KEYWORDS: Philip Roth, *The Professor of Desire*, Jun, persona, shadow, psychoanalysis

Main Paper

Philip Roth's novel *The Professor of Desire* tells the story of David Kepesh. David is a professor who struggles with his desires and identity. To understand him, we can use Carl Jung's psychoanalytic concepts. Jung's ideas help us see how David's mind works. We will look at two main concepts: Persona and Shadow. Jung believed that everyone has a Persona. The Persona is like a mask we wear. "... For Jung the persona is a mask outside world, "a ... that we are not born wearing a mask that masks are given" (Parkes 65 It helps us fit into society. We show our Persona to the world. It hides our true feelings and desires. The Persona helps us look good and accepted. But there is another side to us. Jung called this the Shadow. The Shadow is the part of us we hide. It contains our dark thoughts and desires. "All of us are faced daily with individual and collective manifestations of the Shadow – all that we fear, despise and makes us feel ashamed." (Perry & Tower 1) The Shadow is often negative. It can include anger, fear, and guilt. We don't like to admit these feelings. So, we push them away.

David Kepesh, the protagonist, has a strong Persona. He is a respected professor. He appears confident and knowledgeable. But he also has a Shadow. His Shadow contains his deep desires and fears. These parts of him are hidden from others and sometimes from himself. David's struggle are about balancing his Persona and Shadow. He tries to maintain his public image. But his desires and fears often surface. This creates conflict in his life. He seeks to understand himself and find peace. In this paper, we will explore how David's Persona and Shadow affect his life. We will look at his relationships, career, and inner thoughts. By using Jungian concepts, we can understand David better. This study will show how the Persona and Shadow influence his actions and decisions.

David's Persona is shaped by his role as a professor. He wants to be seen as smart and successful. "Rather than spend the first day of class talking about the reading list and the general idea behind this course, I would like to tell you some things about myself that I have never before divulged to any of my students... I have been told that I am one of the few remaining professors who address students in the classroom as 'Mr.' and 'Miss,' rather than by their given names." (Roth 119) He works hard to maintain this image. But his Shadow

reveals his hidden desires. He has a strong sexual desire that he struggles to control. He also fears failure and rejection. These hidden parts of him often cause problems.

Throughout the novel, David's Persona and Shadow clash. He tries to keep up his public image. But his desires and fears break through. This leads to tension and inner conflict. (Shostak 25) David's journey is about facing these hidden parts of himself. He seeks to understand and accept his Shadow. By studying David through Jung's concepts, we can learn about human nature. We all have a Persona and a Shadow. We all struggle with our hidden desires and fears. David's story helps us see these struggles clearly. His journey can teach us about ourselves. It can help us understand our own Persona and Shadow. This understanding can lead to greater self-awareness and peace.

David Kepesh's Persona is a significant part of his character. His Persona is the image he shows to the world. It is how he wants to be seen by others. David is a professor of literature. This role shapes his Persona. He wants to be seen as intelligent, cultured, and successful. He works hard to maintain this image.

As you may already have surmised—by my style of dress, as easily as from the style of my opening remarks—the conventions traditionally governing the relationship between student and teacher are more or less those by which I have always operated, even during the turbulence of recent years ... I still prefer to appear before you to teach wearing a jacket and a tie ... generally it will be the same jacket and the same tie" (Roth 125)

As a professor, David is respected by his students and colleagues. He presents himself as confident and knowledgeable. He uses his intellect to impress others. This public image is important to him. It gives him a sense of identity and purpose. David's Persona is built on his academic success. He enjoys being admired for his intellect. However, maintaining this Persona is not easy. David must constantly work to keep up his image. He feels pressure to always appear smart and capable. This pressure can be exhausting. It takes a lot of energy to maintain a Persona that may not reflect his true self.

David's relationships are affected by his Persona. He tries to impress others with his intellect and achievements. In his romantic relationships, he wants to be seen as charming and sophisticated. He uses his knowledge of literature and culture to attract women. His Persona is a tool he uses to navigate his social interactions. But David's Persona also creates problems. It can be a barrier to genuine connection. Because

he is so focused on maintaining his image, he may not show his true feelings. This can make his relationships superficial. People see only the mask he wears, not the person behind it. This can lead to loneliness and dissatisfaction. "My misery is raw and colossal... But Tooting Bee? This tiny room? My meals across from the captain's hairline mustache? And for what, to study Arthurian legends and Icelandic sagas? Why all this punishment just for being smart!" (Roth 17) This illustrates David's inner conflict and dissatisfaction, a clash between his persona and the reality he faces.

David's Persona is also a way to hide his insecurities. He fears failure and rejection. By presenting a confident and successful image, he tries to protect himself from these fears. But this protection is fragile. It requires constant effort to uphold. Any threat to his Persona can cause anxiety and stress. Throughout the novel, we see moments when David's Persona cracks. These moments reveal his vulnerabilities. For example, when he faces criticism or failure, his confidence wavers. He feels exposed and insecure. These moments show the gap between his public image and his true self.

David's struggle with his Persona is a common human experience. Many people create a public image that hides their true feelings and fears. They feel pressure to live up to this image. This can be a source of stress and conflict. Jung's concept of the Persona helps us understand this dynamic. In David's case, his Persona is tied to his role as a professor. But everyone has a Persona, regardless of their profession. It is the face we show to the world. It helps us fit into society and be accepted. But it can also create distance from our true selves. Balancing the Persona and the true self is a challenge. "No, nobody understands me, not even I myself." (Roth 18) This statement reflects David's struggle with his persona, the public image he tries to maintain, and his lack of understanding of his true self, which is often overshadowed by his desires and hidden traits. David's journey in the novel involves confronting this challenge. He must face the gap between his Persona and his true self. He must find a way to integrate his public image with his hidden desires and fears. This journey is essential for his personal growth.

David Kepesh's Shadow is the hidden part of his psyche. It contains his deep desires and fears. These parts are often dark and negative. David's Shadow is the opposite of his Persona. While his Persona is about intellect and success, his Shadow is about desire and fear. David's Shadow reveals his strong sexual desires. These desires are intense and sometimes uncontrollable. They conflict with his Persona of a cultured professor. He tries to keep these desires hidden. But they often break through, causing problems in his life.

His sexual desires lead him into complicated relationships. These relationships are often turbulent and unsatisfying. "It seems that at a dinner party at the Schonbrunns' the hostess had announced to all in attendance that Baumgarten has become David Kepesh's 'alter ego,' 'acting out fantasies of aggression against women" (Roth 86). David harbors as a consequence of his marriage and its 'mortifying' ending. This reflects David's shadow, as Baumgarten represents the darker, hidden side of his personality.

"In the presence of the appetitious Baumgartner, am I looking to be exposed ever so mildly to the virulent strain, and thereby immunized for good? Or am I half hoping to be reinfected?"(Roth 97) This reflects David's struggle with his shadow, as he questions his motivations and his connection with Baumgartner, who represents his darker side.

David's fear of failure is another part of his Shadow. He is afraid of not living up to his own standards. This fear drives him to work hard to maintain his Persona. But it also creates anxiety and stress. When he faces failure or criticism, his fear becomes overwhelming. It shakes his confidence and makes him feel vulnerable. "Having failed at being a husband to Helen—having failed at figuring out how to make Helen a wife—it seems I would rather sleep through my life now than live it." (Roth 66) This reflects David's persona, the mask he wears to cope with his failures and his desire to escape reality.

David's Shadow also contains feelings of guilt. He feels guilty about his desires and actions. He knows that his behavior often hurts others. "The Professor of Desire is about the surprises that desire brings; and ... what's hurting him—and it isn't the goyim." (Roth "Conversations" 101) This guilt adds to his inner conflict. He struggles to reconcile his actions with his Persona. "Indeed, there are times when, listening to him speak with such shamelessness of the wide range of his satisfactions, I feel that I am in the presence of a parodied projection of myself. A parody—a possibility. Maybe Baumgartner feels somewhat the same about me, and this explains the curiosity at either end." (Roth 96) This illustrates the mirroring of Baumgartner and David, highlighting the shadow aspect of David's character.

David's Shadow influences his relationships. His hidden desires lead to affairs and sexual escapades. These actions are driven by his Shadow, not his Persona. They create conflict in his romantic relationships. He tries to hide these actions from his partners. But the truth often comes out, causing pain and distrust. "How, for instance, have I come to be on such terrible terms with sensuality?"'You,' he replies, 'who married a femme

fatale?' 'But only to de-fatalize her, to de-fang her, along the way. All that nagging at her, at Helen, about the garbage and the laundry and the toast.'" (Roth 66) This quote shows David's internal conflict and the persona he adopts to manage his relationship.

David's relationship with his parents also reflects his Shadow. He has complicated feelings towards them. He seeks their approval but also feels burdened by their expectations. His fear of failure and desire for approval are part of his Shadow. These feelings shape his actions and decisions. Throughout the novel, David's Shadow and Persona are in constant conflict. He tries to maintain his public image. But his hidden desires and fears often disrupt his life. This conflict creates tension and inner turmoil. David's journey involves facing his Shadow. He must acknowledge and understand his hidden parts. Understanding the Shadow is essential for personal growth. Jung believed that integrating the Shadow leads to wholeness. This means accepting and understanding our hidden desires and fears. For David, this journey is difficult. He struggles to face the parts of himself he wants to hide.

David's encounters with different women highlight his struggle with the Shadow. Each relationship reveals different aspects of his hidden self. His affair with Birgitta reveals his intense sexual desire. His relationship with Claire shows his fear of commitment. His marriage to Helen highlights his guilt and need for approval. David's journey towards self-awareness involves integrating his Shadow. He must accept his desires and fears as part of himself. This acceptance can lead to a more balanced and fulfilling life. It requires honesty and courage. David's struggle is a reflection of this difficult journey.

Jung's concept of the Shadow helps us understand David's inner conflict. It shows the hidden parts of his psyche that influence his actions. By acknowledging the Shadow, we can gain a deeper understanding of David's character. This understanding can also help us reflect on our own hidden desires and fears. David Kepesh's journey in *The Professor of Desire* is about integrating his Persona and Shadow. This integration is essential for personal growth and self-awareness. Jung believed that understanding and accepting both the Persona and the Shadow leads to wholeness. For David, this process is challenging but necessary. David's decisions and actions throughout the novel are influenced by both his Persona and his Shadow. His Persona drives him to seek intellectual success and social approval. He works hard to maintain his image as a respected professor. This image gives him a sense of identity and purpose. However, his Shadow reveals his hidden desires and fears. These hidden parts often disrupt his life and relationships.

David's struggle to integrate his Persona and Shadow is evident in his relationships with women. His affair with Birgitta is driven by his Shadow. His intense sexual desire leads him into a passionate but problematic relationship. This affair conflicts with his Persona of a cultured and controlled intellectual. The tension between his desires and his public image creates inner turmoil. "Just as the raging Catskill winters transform each of us back into a sweeter, saner, innocent, more sentimental sort of Kepesh, so in my room in Syracuse solitude goes to work on me and gradually I feel the lightweight and the show-off blessedly taking his leave." This indicates David's struggle to rid himself of the negative, superficial aspects of his personality. David's relationship with Claire also highlights his struggle. Claire represents stability and commitment. David's Persona wants to be seen as a reliable partner. However, his Shadow fears commitment and craves freedom. This fear leads to the end of his relationship with Claire. David's inability to reconcile his desires and fears results in pain and loss.

David's marriage to Helen is another crucial part of his journey. Helen represents acceptance and understanding. She sees beyond David's Persona and accepts his hidden parts. This relationship challenges David to confront his Shadow. He must face his fears and desires honestly. Helen's acceptance helps David move towards self-awareness. Throughout the novel, David experiences moments of self-reflection. These moments are crucial for integrating his Persona and Shadow. He begins to understand the hidden parts of himself. He recognizes how his desires and fears influence his actions. This understanding is the first step towards acceptance.

David's journey towards self-awareness is not easy. He faces many challenges and setbacks. However, each experience brings him closer to understanding himself. He learns that his Persona and Shadow are both parts of who he is. Accepting this duality is essential for personal growth.

The integration of Persona and Shadow is a lifelong process. For David, this journey continues beyond the novel. He must continue to face his hidden desires and fears. He must learn to balance his public image with his true self. This balance is essential for a fulfilling and authentic life.

Jung's concepts of Persona and Shadow provide a framework for understanding David's journey. They help us see the complexities of his character. By examining his Persona, we understand his public image and the

pressures he faces. By exploring his Shadow, we see his hidden desires and fears. This dual perspective gives us a complete picture of his psychological journey.

The Professor of Desire is a rich novel for Jungian analysis. David Kepesh's journey highlights the struggle between Persona and Shadow. His story teaches us about the complexities of the human psyche. By examining his character through Jung's concepts, we gain insight into our own minds. This understanding can help us navigate our own journey towards self-awareness and wholeness. David's story is a reminder that the path to self-acceptance is challenging but essential. It is a journey worth undertaking for a more authentic and fulfilling life.

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