

Sex as a Metaphor in Philip Roth's Kepesh Trilogy

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Abstract

Roth's writing excellency is uniquely and evident in the way he metaphorically and self-consciously establishes that connection between himself as a writer and his fictional voice. This paper aims at investigating Philip Roth's use of sexuality as a metaphor in his early fiction. Noticeably, sexuality for Philip Roth is a theme that exposes hidden narratives that work to conceal the conceits of Roth's protagonists. Roth's hidden narratives have many aspects: one of which is to reveal the real meanings of recent European experiences. Another thing is to convey the Jewish experience of fear and racial prejudice in America; even though, he once rejected to be labeled as a Jewish writer. Roth intends to present the inner struggles of his main Jewish characters through a metaphorical fictional presentation of their sexual perversion and debauchery that commonly prove to be acts of vindication against their social milieu. In the grotesque image of a male body entrapping himself in a female breast lurks the hidden desire to attack society by means of ineptness and perversion. In the wandering sexual adventures of an academic professor lies the secret meaning of the lost identity of a diasporic Jew whose sole means of conquering the world is sexual debauchery. The image of a waning sexual prowess is another metaphorical representation of the idea of the Jewish protagonist who is unwilling to admit his failings so he chooses to let others die for the sake of pertaining his false legacy of his Jewish-male-ethnic-intellectual superiority.

Keywords: metaphor, sexuality, metamorphosis, Jewish identity, displacement, misogyny, self-vindication, dismemberment, fetishism, sexual revolution.

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Philip Roth is a renowned Jewish-American writer (1933-2018). He received the Pulitzer Prize for his novel *American Pastoral* (1997) and was awarded the U.S. National Book Award for Fiction for his masterpiece novella *Goodbye, Columbus* (1959). Although his novels incorporate social commentary and political satire, the elements of autobiographical fiction are very apparent in most of his works. Roth's fiction revolves around many topics, such as; postwar American life, especially the experiences of Jewish Americans' childhood nostalgia, and spotlights American patriotism and idealism in a distinctive satirical register. His novels *Portnoy's Complaint* (1969) and *Sabbath's Theater* (1995) are the most notorious examples.

Roth's fictional excellency is uniquely evident in the way he metaphorically and self-consciously establishes the connection between his fictional creations and his personal experience. Such a close relationship between the author's life and his fictional characters could be evidenced among his protagonists and narrators like David Kepesh, Nathan Zuckerman, and in a character named Philip Roth after himself who appears in *The Plot Against America* (2004).

This paper attempts to investigate Philip Roth's use of sexuality as a metaphor in his early fiction. Noticeably, sexuality for Philip Roth is a theme that exposes hidden narratives that work to conceal the conceits of Roth's protagonists. Roth's hidden narratives have many aspects: one of which is to reveal the real meanings of recent European Jewish experience by hypothesizing a Jewish experience of racial prejudice in America; even though, he once rejected to be labeled as a Jewish writer.

In this regard, a metaphor is a form of figurative language in which expressions are meant something other than their literal expression. Sharad Rajimwale defines metaphor as "a figure of speech in which a word or phrase literally denoting one kind of

object or idea is used in place of another to suggest a likeness or analogy between them" (110). Additionally, metaphors could be used by the writer to make the theme more relatable to the reader or to make complex political or social ideas easier to comprehend. This is applicable when the reader fathoms the depth of what is between and beyond the lines. In Philip Roth's case the literal meaning is to a great extent embarrassing, so readers should not take what is said literally, but rather should pay attention to the writer's hidden/undercover ideology. To put this more accurately, Roth uses sex metaphorically to discuss many hidden social and political issues pertaining to the American-Jewish community indirectly. For instance, in Kepesh trilogy: *The Breast* (1972), *The Professor of Desire* (1977), and *The Dying Animal* (2001), he uses sexual metaphors as the titles of the novels allude to write an alternative American-Jewish history.

To begin with, *The Breast* (1972) tells the story of professor, David Kepesh, who awakens on the morning 18th February 1971 to find himself changed into a six-foot female breast. Kepesh narrates his sexual ravings about his desire for Claire, the twenty-five years old woman he has been dating for three years. Kepesh's desire for Claire was waning off during the past year, but everything has completely changed after his transformation. The metamorphosis of Kepesh's body made it impossible for him to have any sexual intercourse with Claire as his penis was becoming a nipple and the rest of his body was metamorphosing into a huge breast of 155-pounds disconnected from any human form.

Thus, Kepesh's relationship with Claire witnessed a sort of warmth and stability without "the accompanying burden of dependence, or the grinding boredom"(28) of most previous relationships to which he was accustomed. Kepesh's discourse with his psychiatrist Dr. Klinger reveals his feelings about his

sudden metamorphosis into a full-length-female breast. Kepesh has bad feelings concerning his fear of death. Actually, his will to live is as permanent as his sexual lusts. At the hospital, Kepesh feels a strong desire to have sex with Claire or one of the nurses who bathe him. Most of the satirical narrative ravings that make up Kepesh's confessional discourse revolve around the many different imaginative ways for a breast to have sex, especially with his wife Claire and his nurse Miss Clark.

He ends up satisfying himself with the sensual gratification he receives through Claire's kisses and the bathings provided by the fifty-six-year-old Miss Clark. Worse even, through the homosexual intercourse he has with a pervert male nurse. Kepesh imagines that the "appetites could only become progressively strange, until at last [he] reached a peak of disorientation from which [he] would fall—or leap—into the void" (42). Roth creates a blurred line between factual narrative and imaginative raving through the metaphorical grotesque image of a respectable American-Jewish Associate professor transformed into a sexually hyperactive full-length female breast. For instance, Kepesh claims that he has become insane; moreover, he wonders many times if his reading of Franz Kafka's literature has driven him to insanity. The use of sexual metaphors in *The Breast* is meant to express many deep psychological ailments on the part of the main Jewish characters who typically assume the narrative focal point.

The Breast is a great metaphorical fictional work because it introduces a distinctively thorough character study of an American-Jewish man caught in an existential limbo exposed by trapping him in a shamefully sexual metaphysical metamorphosis. In this entrapment, the protagonist suffers many psychological frustrations based on his metaphorical erotic fantasies. The end result is a metaphorical representation of the classical struggle between debasing sensuality of the human body and spirit. The

struggle aggravates in the case of the American-Jewish Kepesh due to the dichotomy of the struggle between his Jewish background and his American aspirations. In other words, the Jewish character in this sexual metaphorical entrapment is suffering from the inner psychological struggle between abiding by his Jewish identity with all its due expectations of traditional piety, religious conformity, ethical superiority, and hankering after the debased sensual and degrading gratification of his American dream.

In the same vein, *The Professor of Desire* (1977) discusses David Kepesh's youth, the college years, his academic career, and his ungratified sexual desires. David Kepesh is a professor of literature who leads a double-standard life. The respectable professor of literature is a sexually-driven man who constantly hankers after women; hence, he is a professor of desire. For instance, Kepesh picks up girls in the reading room of the library and utters words like "your ass is a masterpiece." The reader is told all the time that his sexual desire "knows no bounds" (54). When Kepesh travels to London for a Fulbright fellowship, he meets Elisabeth and Birgitta: two sexually active young women. The novel begins with his account of how he began dating Elisabeth. However, after a short period, Kepesh returns to California, and there he marries Helen, a woman who is trying to move on after an unsuccessful relationship with a married man. Kepesh and Helen's relationship does not last for a long time. They become separated, but Professor Kepesh will not be alone for long. On one of the weekends, he meets Claire who works as a teacher and they become sexually involved with each other. Kepesh reminisces how Sundays were "when [they] would cling together in [his] bed until three in the afternoon" (62). The novel ends with an early morning carnal scene in which Kepesh is suckling on Claire's breasts.

In *The Dying Animal* (2001), David Kepesh is a much older professor than in the previous two fictional works. His sexual relationship with Claire is waning at its end. The typically sensual Professor Kepesh engages in a new sexual affair with one of his beautiful young students, Consuela Castillo, a sexually active girl with "round, full, perfect" breasts and "nearly pornographic underwear" (23). After having sexual intercourse with her for the first time, Kepesh imparts to her, "with a self-contained woman of such sexual power, you have no idea and you never will" (28). Kepesh teaches his twenty-four-year-old student how to enact all his sexual grotesqueries in an attempt for the gratification of his insatiable sexual desire. The highly-experienced sixty-two-year-old professor teaches his student a *mélange* of licentious acts ranging between acrobatic positions, oral coitus and menstrual voyeurism.

Kepesh transforms Consuela into his filthy little prostitute. However, the implausible age gap between both of them, as well as the cultural background differences, hinder the arrangement of any meeting between them publicly. Being afraid to meet Consuela in public is a hindrance that infuriated Kepesh all through their relationship. Kepesh once complains, "[D]ating is hateful, relationships are impossible, sex is a hazard" (42). Finally, after some years of their sexual relationship, Consuela asks Kepesh to take some photos of her naked breasts after she learns about her infliction with breast cancer. She knew how he was highly-fascinated with her breasts—a fascination that runs throughout the whole Kepesh trilogy.

In the above synopses of the fictional works that make up the Kepesh trilogy there is a common thread of using the grotesqueries of sexual acts and liaisons as a metaphorical representation of a parallel inner grotesquery of an ever-lasting inner psychological ailment within the American-Jewish Kepesh. Although David Kepesh, same like his seminal fictional predecessor Alexander

Portnoy, is forever caught in a limbo between abiding by the fulfillment of the aspirations of his ethical affiliation of societal ascendancy and financial gain and his deeply oppressed debase sexual debauchery that come as a projection of his deepest psychological disturbances. Typically, all the main male characters throughout Philip Roth's fiction are in "the middle of a Jewish joke," in which a very successful Jewish man is mocking himself by engaging in sexual degradation. This is wryly presented through the recurrent metaphorical use of the sex motif. This paper aims at investigating the metaphorical connotations of the sexual lasciviousness commonly presented in what is literarily referred to as the Kepesh trilogy.

The image of a helpless female breast sagging on a hammock especially devised for Professor Kepesh has very deep connotations that are worthy of close interpretation. Despite of the apparent humorous tone in Kepesh's description of his metamorphosis into "an organism with the general shape of a football, or a dirigible," (12) there is a serious metaphorical meaning to be revealed. Kepesh is aware of how this unspeakable sudden metamorphosis degraded both his social and academic being. Still what belies the sarcastic tone in Kepesh's metaphorical descriptions are his contending feelings of remorse and vainglory. Kepesh is psychologically entrapped between his academic status and his debased sexual transformation, as he says:

I think of these aquatic mammals because of the overall resemblance I now bear to them in size and shape, and because the porpoise in particular is said to be intelligent, perhaps even rational, creature. Porpoise with a Ph.D. Associate Porpoise Kepesh. Really, it is the silliness, the triviality, the meaninglessness of life that one misses most in a life like this. For aside from the monstrous, ludicrous fact

of me, there is the intellectual responsibility that I seem to have developed to this preposterous misfortune. WHAT DOES IT MEAN? HOW COULD IT HAVE HAPPENED? IN THE ENTIRE HISTORY OF THE HUMANE RACE, WHY PROFESSOR KEPESH? (26-27)

Noticeably, Kepesh is in a state of unresolved conflict between the psychological demands of his inner self such as his ungratified sexual desires and the requirements of his outer social position as an academic scholar. Interestingly enough, *The Breast*, like many of Roth's novels, draws much of its metaphors from the body excess. This novel seems to be the summation of the metaphor of sex in Roth's fiction. The scandalous humor of professor Kepesh transforming into a human breast covers a plethora of connotations related to the blurred lines between Philip Roth's personal life and literary position as a Jewish American writer and his hidden and/or unspoken fears and desires that this metaphorical metamorphosis reveals under this current critical investigation.

Kai Mikkonen, in *The Metamorphosed Parodical Body in Philip Roth's The Breast*, links between the metaphorical sexual image of the breast and the subjective stance of the writer himself. Philip Roth's sex metaphors involve a wry humor effect in which the main Jewish character –referred to critically as the "schlemiel"—entangles himself in a mesh of debase relations and degrading self-mockery to attack his social periphery:

[...] subjectivity, and sexuality are related in *The Breast* through the ethnic subtext of the schlemiel, the antihero of many Jewish stories and jokes. [...]A significant characteristic of the schlemiel is that his failure should be a source of amusement for others. According to the Universal

Jewish Encyclopedia, a Schlemiel is one who handles a situation in the worst possible manner or dogged by ill luck that is more or less due to his own ineptness In a very general sense the Jewish Schlemiel's predicament, or what Freud sees as the mixture of self-irony and self-pity in Jewish marriage-broker stories, applies to David Kepesh's situation Kepesh filed in all of his relationships with women, finally also with his wife Claire, and then turned into a breast. (38)

In the meantime, the relative ambiguity of texts like *The Breast* is partially due to the enduring popularity of Roth's other erotically-charged novels. It is noteworthy, Roth's writing is obscure due to the fact that his fictional creations are full of semi-autobiographical elements and that is why his writing is subjective to a great extent. For instance, his fictional character Claire is named after his real-life wife, the actress Claire Bloom, and the metaphorical use of her name in *The Breast* is extremely vindictive because they did not lead a happy life with each other. Their marriage was unsuccessful and they eventually broke up. Another feature of Roth's semi-autobiographical elements that deem his fictional creations ambiguous is his own innate problematic psychological imbalance between the polar opposites of his double identity: partly Jewish and partly American. The ambiguity of the hidden connotations of sexual grotesqueries prevalent throughout Roth's fiction is, in fact, a metaphorical expression of the common dilemma of all his fictional creations. Sexuality is a central theme in all of Roth's novels all through his literary career starting from *Portnoy's Complaint* up to *Sabbath's Theater*.

Jonathan Franzen declares that he is "happy to hold up the savage hilarity of *Sabbath's Theater* as a correction and reproach of the

sentimentality of certain young American writers and not-so-young critics who seem to believe, in defiance of Kafka, that literature is about being nice” (125).

To put this more accurately, the sexual content in *The Breast* is a metaphorical presentation of the cross-gender problem, through which Roth deals with his double identity dilemma. Through sex, Roth could conceal his vindictive nature against both the Jewish and the American society to neither of which his subjective self-image confirms. Debra Shostak claims that “by representing the very fleshliness of gendering, Roth forces a confrontation with the manifold meanings of the gendered body” (30) – with the conclusion that “selfhood is inextricable from embodiment” (21). This confrontation is rooted in the “psychosexual territory a child crosses before encountering the desire for the [metaphoric] power of the phallus”, a claim which allows Shostak to explore the [metaphoric] particularity of the breast, which comes to stand for the unattainability of knowledge(35).

Sexuality, as configured through the person of David Kepesh, becomes metaphorically a process of perpetual displacement. Replacing the subjective metaphoric associations of sexuality with a more objective state (in which the breast becomes the subject of a given gaze) provides Shostak with the hypothetical consideration of Kepesh’s transformation as “effectively render[ing] the body a corpse, the epitome of lack” (37). In addition, Kai Mikkonen, in *The Metamorphosed Parodical Body in Philip Roth's The Breast*, refers to the vindictive nature of Kepesh's metamorphosis "in terms of Kepesh's sexuality, metamorphosis functions as both a[metaphor] for a transgressive or illicit sexual behavior and for its repression or necessary displacement" (38).

In its corpse-like reduced form, the breast-body becomes abject, placed in the borderlands of an identity crisis. Shostak develops this argument by utilizing the work of Julia Kristeva, quoting Kristeva's theory that "the abject is the violence of mourning for an 'object' that has already been lost" – an unattainable, Oedipal desire for a lost maternal origin (38). Ironically enough, David can metaphorically hear, talk, and engage in sexual grotesqueries through that protruding part. David Kepesh describes himself as a hermaphrodite in a very sarcastic manner:

Since the apertures in the nipple provide me with something like a mouth and vestigial ears—at least it has seemed to me that I am able to make myself heard through my nipple, and, faintly, to hear through it what is going on around me—I have assumed that it was my head that had become my nipple. But the doctors concluded otherwise, at least as of this month. (16)

Kepesh is a man who has lost control over his body and consequently over his life. It is a leap from the active social life this man used to have into the inactivity and ineptness of the shape he is now confined in.

In this sense, the bisexuality of David Kepesh's transformation serves his darkest vindictive aims. David Kepesh is visited and nursed by the hospital staff nurses and doctors, as well as his closest relatives. In fact, Professor Kepesh's helplessness as a female breast obliges his relatives to serve him in ways he wouldn't dare to ask when he was his normal self. Moreover, the ineptness of his metamorphosis degrades others as well as all that is left of his self-esteem in a metaphorical sense. David Kepesh's metamorphosed body is given intensive care by the hospital's nurses—both males and females. For instance, he

experiences the utmost relief in gratifying his pervert sexual desires when his female nurse washes and massages him.

In a similar vein, Sarah Cohen Blacher sheds light on the Jews' perpetual pursuit to prove their identity in a different society from a Jewish perspective is "born out of the vast discrepancy between what was to be the "chosen people's" glorious destiny and their desperate traits" (1). Ironically enough, they were compelled to adapt to the incongruities of their existence because most of their attempts were perilous. Sarah Cohen Blacher argues:

[...] they found that God had signaled them out to be a light unto the nations, but had given them a benighted existence. Powerful in interpreting the vast complexities of sacred texts, they were powerless in their dealings with brainless peasants, priding themselves on the cohesiveness of their private world; they felt isolated from the world at large. (2)

Since the Jews had a permanent feeling of isolation from the world in general, they wanted to distance themselves from the stereotyped image of unintegrated immigrants in American society after World War II. Sarah Blacher Cohen traces the effect of the social background of both the Jews and the blacks who were usually looked down upon by the powerful elite WASP stereotypically as obnoxious shylocks and genial blacks. They were, Cohen writes, "the butts of American society's aggressive humor" specially designed to hinder the "wretched refuse" from joining the mainstream American culture. Fictional creations by both blacks and Jews adopted metanarrative techniques and metaphorical representation to:

[A]lter misconceptions, to sustain their pride and recoup their powers, both blacks and Jews retaliated with a hidden form of protest humor, response to

subordination which Joseph Boskin characterized as “inwardly masochistic and tragic and externally aggressive and acrimonious. (6-7)

Another presumption concerning the ambiguous nature of Roth's metaphorical representation assumes that the grotesque image, according to Bakhtinian thought, is a means of dialogic interaction with the world. It is a means of reproduction and change of old forms and entities into new ones: it is not a static or finished off entity:

The grotesque body, as we have often stressed, is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body. [...] copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body—all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all these events the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven. (317)

As a matter of fact, Kepesh's transformation is a metaphoric metamorphosis of his oppressed self into a breast. This metamorphosis gives Kepesh an exclusively autonomous capacity to select his recipients and means of communication. In David Kepesh's case, it is his nipple through which he interacts with the world—sometimes manipulates it. Kepesh's metamorphosis serves him in obliging the others, forcing them actually, to do whatever he desires now and was denied before.

In this sense, Roth uses sex as a metaphor in order to express the subjectivity and the individuality which he is socially denied. Kepesh admits his bitter sense of humiliation through the idea of sexual stimulation by a pervert man while living as a female breast which is

naturally ridiculous, “I realize that the conjunction of male mouth and female nipple can hardly be described as a homosexual act” seems almost prescient (40). While Kepesh strongly acknowledges “the homosexual taboo” over his actions, he still requires himself to be “temporarily anesthetized” (40) and washed by his male nurse. As usual, Kepesh attempts elaborate methods to control his desires, and ends up only exposing their elusiveness. Presumably, Roth metaphorically expresses his dismemberment and social rejection through fetishism, i.e. using the breast as a metaphor. What he actually seeks is the embodied subject. His presence as a desired object seems to suppress language order; the first person narration of his predicament builds his subjectivity in discourse.

In other words, Kepesh embodies the two categories that he had previously viewed as being absolutely distinctive—the heterosexual and the homosexual combined in one body is a sort of metaphorical expression of self- degradation on part of the academic professor. Thus, Kepesh's being symbolizes the binaries that Shostak theorizes in deconstructing Roth's depiction of gender identity in *The Breast*. Roth complicates the idea that individuals have an understandable relationship to their bodies. This process, as Shostak illustrates with a reading of a passage from an unpublished sequel to *The Breast*, "dooms Kepesh to an endless process of rationalization without the clarity of incontrovertible knowledge" (40-1). As a breast, too, Kepesh represents the fetishized feminine object as a contradictory sign simultaneously metaphoric of wholeness, dismemberment, and difference, and, of course, brings to the fore the very fact that the breast is fetishized, the primary object in several senses of the term.

Additionally, long before his transformation into a breast, Kepesh recounts remorsefully how his sexual relationship with Claire did not satisfy him:

I must make clear before getting further, that Claire is no vixen; though throughout our affair she had been wonderfully aroused by ordinary sexual practices.... I did not complain bitterly about this, but from time to time, as men who have not yet been turned into breasts are wont to do, I registered my discontent—I was not, you see, getting all I wanted out of life. (33)

Additionally, Kepesh's misogynous attitude towards Claire is a *melange* of fetishism and perversion. In fact, Roth's trilogy is written in their omniscient voices or the first person narration of their male protagonist. The novels, in addition, tell the story of an American-Jewish man whose introversive accounts, personal thoughts, and reveries are the hub of the main action. Yet, what is striking about these novels is the marginal existence, sometimes exclusion, of the female voice. Women in the subjective narration of their male fictional creators are rarely given the chance to express themselves or to defend their side against men's misogynous degradation. For instance, Kepesh admits that he was so obsessed with Claire's breasts to the extent of wishing one time to be breasted. Therefore, after his transformation, Kepesh recalls how he has been metaphorically transformed into the object he craved most:

I assure you that I have wanted things far less whimsically in my life than I wanted on that beach to be breasted. Why should playful, loverly, words spoken on the first day of our idyllic vacation, become flesh, while whatever I have wanted in deadly earnest I have been able to achieve, if not at all, only by putting one foot in front of the other over the course of thirty-five years? (37)

In this respect, Professor David Kepesh's transformation into a female breast—the very object he yearned for—is a metaphorical metamorphosis of his inner self's most denied desires, which he felt unable to satisfy because of the requirements of his social and academic prestige. This metamorphosis, however, is a metaphorical act of vindication of his unfulfilled desires. It is noteworthy that one of the stereotypes of Jews in Western culture, especially the American one, is that they are lustful and fond of sex, and because Kepesh is now in his middle-age, he is in complete contrast to that image of sexual vitality that he drew for himself. Thus, the idea of the metamorphosed breast that combines male and female entity at the same time appears. Roth exaggerates this image to evoke a sense of humor, but the hidden metaphorical meaning is that he is mocking and vindicating his community. In another sense, Roth mocks his double identity as a Jewish- American; same as his dual gender is between masculinity and femininity. Henceforth, Roth is self-shattered between being a sexually insatiable Jew and a respected American university professor.

Fredrick Crews claims that Roth has "chosen a storyline that looks ideally suited to his taste for outrageous sexual farce, has side-stepped the opportunity and instead written a work of high seriousness" (n.p). Acknowledging the "sarcasm and ambiguity" of the Rilke passage, argues Crews, does not sufficiently diminish the seriousness of the message itself. Similarly, the denial of interpretative models is depicted by Crews as being a mere vehicle for the reader to be able to "grasp Kepesh's humanity without any overlay of ideas." (n.p) At the moment of sexual gratification, Kepesh expresses his vindication against his society metaphorically. It is a society that deprives him of gratifying his deepest pervert sexual desires which he cannot

explicitly confess. The highest moment in self-realization is enacted through his self-vindication against his long-oppressed desires. Kepesh's adaptation of the outer guise of respectable academic professor is a flimsy defense mechanism that can barely hide his deepest vengeful nature which comes to the surface through a metaphorical vengeful act of sexual debauchery that violates his societal periphery. In this respect, even though *The Breast* is different in form as well as content from Roth's earlier fictional creations, it can be read as an episode in a long sequel of stories that typically depict Jewish antiheroes entangled in existentialist predicaments. The basic struggle is between the two opposing identities with a cutting edge symbolized by their hyphenated label, and metaphorically in the case of *The Breast* by a body that combines opposing sexes.

More importantly, the notion of self-realization is a central theme in much of Roth's early work. Especially in the melodramatic realism of scripts like *When She Was Good* more than many of Roth's other works, these texts are concerned with the intersection of identity and embodiment alike inside and outside an explicitly Jewish context. Combined, they help construct the theoretical basis for the enforced bodily transmutation of David Kepesh – in these earlier texts, bodies are constantly violated, and self-conceptions are consistently exposed as shallow and liable to comic metaphorical subversion. In *The Breast*, David Kepesh would accuse his fantasized enemies of being “sleek, self-satisfied houyhnhnms”, mocking their claims to moral authority. Kai Mikkonen comments:

In the case of the breast, however, repression follows closely on the tail of transgression. The metamorphosed body of David Kepesh is given the right to be sexual although his sexual needs are thoroughly changed. Kepesh's transformation gives

him a new, castrated sexual identity that at first is out of his control and a source of great anxiety but that later he masters. Kepesh takes control over his situation in several ways: his mounting homophobia; the redefinition of his nipple as a male organ... (37-38)

Obviously, Philip Roth is one of the second post-war generations of American-Jewish writers, *per se* and from among other ethnic minorities, whose writings metaphorically reflect their attitude towards their uneasy situation of strongly regarding themselves as members of the Jewish community, but wishing to separate themselves from the stereotypical image of the unassimilated immigrants. Moreover, Dan Ben-Amos contends that American Jews find themselves caught in a socio-psychological dilemma as they try to define their ethnic identity between dual polar opposites; “on the one hand they measure themselves in relationship to normative American culture, and on the other hand they set for themselves the standards of traditional Judaism. Since they resemble none of these, they consequently indulge in self-derogatory humor” (119). In other words, it is a schizophrenic existence of American Jews once underscoring their adherence to the values of mainstream American culture and another rejecting what they considered ostentatious in the conformity of their Americanized parents to the values of well-to-do suburbia. Nonetheless, this kind of metaphorical writing is a form of revolting against the depreciating underestimation of the superior majority.

Indeed, Kepesh's mammalian figure is a partial organism and at the same time a metaphor of how the character searches for ultimate satisfaction (through sex) that is condemned by his tendency to underestimate other people for utilitarian roles. According to Klein, this explicates why Kepesh "often interacts

with tantrums when people in his life don't obey his scenario that he actually imagined for them. For example, the way Kepesh seems to bully his father into confirming his analyses" (62). Unable or unwilling to see the partial object as a whole person, Kepesh only has a limited understanding of desires – both those of himself and other people. He has metaphorically internalized the logic of breast-identification in the process of his transformation. Interestingly, manipulating his social milieu, Professor Kepesh argues that in his present condition of helplessness, his sexual desires should be gratified thoroughly. Thus, Kepesh tells his psychiatrist that he cannot help but ask for being satisfied:

Yes! Why not! It's insane otherwise! I should have what I want! This is no ordinary life and I am not going to pretend that it is! *You* want me to be ordinary, you *expect* me to be ordinary—in this condition! I'm supposed to go on being a sensible man—in this condition! ...I want Claire to do what I want! What makes that grotesque!...Tell me why that shouldn't be! Instead you torture me! Instead you prevent me from having what I want! Instead I lie here being sensible! And there's the madness, Doctor—being sensible!" (41)

Actually, Kepesh's metamorphosis is an enlargement of his deepest sexual desires that he could not fulfill in his normal life. In other words, hiding behind superficial grotesquery of his metamorphosis he metaphorically avenges his deepest psychological ailments. In other words, Kepesh uses sex metaphorically to hide his psychological predicaments.

In *The Professor of Desire*, sexuality is a metaphor behind which many hidden narratives conceits about Roth and his Jewish protagonists are hidden. In other words, this novel is another tackling of the role of the relationship between place and identity in the psychological crises of Roth's main Jewish protagonists. This is not to say that Roth's early works are placeless; in other words, the geographical anxiety is traceable in the main characters' turbulent experiences in variant American and European locals. As with most of Roth's main themes, sex is inseparable from other concerns. With this in mind, it becomes worthy investigating how America and Europe are represented by Roth in this novel. Roth metaphorically investigates how the cultural boundaries in the pursuit of a form of self-realization are psychologically and geographically unconquerable due to inability of Roth's characters to reach self-satisfying definitions of their identities. David Kepesh, later known as Professor Kepesh, recounts a very important phase of his personality formation: his sojourn in Europe in search of an academic accomplishment as well as psychological balance. The novel poses a very important existential question: will Kepesh avail in his pursuit or he is forever doomed to failure? In fact, the idea of identity loss in Roth's fiction requires a more detailed examination through the intertextual revisiting of Kepesh's erotic history with the aim of how this deep sense of psychological perplexity is metaphorically presented in Roth's fiction.

The intertextual metaphorical representation of the foibles of human sexuality in Roth's fiction is a keynote in understanding the presentation of Associate Professor Kepesh's character in *The Breast* as well as the presentation of the overseas scholar David Kepesh's character in *The Professor of Desire*. Both men are in search for their lost identities within forms of sexual metamorphoses and a diasporic act of sexual licentiousness.

David Kepesh in *The Professor of Desire* and *The Breast* is typically monologic in his expression of being socially isolated while in search for answers to the question of his double identity crisis. Consequently, this may explicate the frantic search for explanations of his actual and/or metaphorical transformation.

The Professor of Desire tells the story of David Kepesh's academic accomplishment in a Fulbright fellowship during his stay in London as well as his sexual indulgence in promiscuous relations. Kepesh has always suffered from feelings of social rejection starting from his experience in school. So, he says, "I'm terrified that if I should drown while ice skating or break my neck while sledding, the envelope postmarked BROOKLYN, will be found by one of my schoolmates, and they will all stand around my corpse holding their noses" (8).

The *mélange* of academic achievement and sexual grotesqueries reverberates throughout the monologic narrative account of David Kepesh. The perplexity of academic status and sexual debauchery is as a central theme in *The Breast* as it is in *The Professor of Desire*. Still, the metaphorical connotations of sex and desire in Roth's latter novel are *in lieu* of grotesque metamorphosis of his earlier one. To begin with, the title of the novel is a metaphorical indication of the perplexed identity of Kepesh's character as a doubly successful academician and a sexually insatiable pervert. David expresses his perplexed feelings as he describes himself as a "rake among scholars, a scholar among rakes"(12). The title is also a metaphorical indication of the crisis of the Jewish identity pertaining David Kepesh as a member of the Jewish people who self-righteously consider themselves the torch bearers of human enlightenment while at the same time, he is another stereotypical embodiment of the sexually insatiable Jewish man. The loss of identity suffered by David Kepesh is another metaphorical representation of the idea of the

lost Jew. David is stricken with pangs of diasporic existence in Europe while living with a foster European family and engaging sexually with European licentious women. To begin with, the sense of identity loss is embedded in David Kepesh's personality regardless of his geographical location. Thus, David expresses his sorrowful feelings of being socially rejected even when he was still a young schoolboy:

I am one of two Jewish children in a class of twenty-five, and a feel for the rules and preferences of society (as ingrained in me, it seems, as susceptibility to the feverish, the flamboyant, the bizarre) dictates that, regardless of how tempted I may be to light my fuse and show these hicks a few of Herbie's fireworks, I do not distinguish myself from my schoolmates by anything other than grades. To do otherwise, I realize—and without my father even having to remind me—will get me nowhere. And nowhere is not where I am expected to go. (8)

Meanwhile, the undergraduate Kepesh is depicted musing over his increasing isolation in the university community: “No, nobody understands me – not even I myself” (26).

Nevertheless, Philip Roth's Kepesh trilogy is mainly characterized by its central male Jewish characters' repetitive metaphorical attempts to fulfill their self-actualization through sex. William Peden explains:

Most of Mr. Roth's protagonists are, like Neil Klugman, adrift in a limbo between past and present. The author seems to know his people inside out...these stories, though concerned with universal, archetypal experiences, are somewhat transmuted into that which is at once strange and familiar. “I'm a Jew,” one character says. “I'm different. Better, maybe not. But different.”(n.p)

In his pursuit of self-realization, Kepesh gets lost in many directions due to his lack of psychological balance and innate sense of lost identity. For instance, the narrative sections of domestic bliss with Claire are in sheer contrast with those sections featuring Kepesh's first wife, Helen. The opposition between happy blisssed sexual relationship and another doomed one is a metaphorical expression of the dichotomized self of the main character. This is *per se* an extended metaphorical representation of the lost Jew enacted in his marital and extramarital sex; sex in the homeland and alien locales; straight sex and sexual perversion.

Kepesh's tendency in *The Professor of Desire* to render Europe as a mythic 'other' has a totalizing effect that reverberates in his own explorations of selfhood. Place and identity are metaphorically linked in many of Roth's novels usually in the service of a destabilizing ambiguity. In this sense, *The Professor of Desire* offers a continual intertextual complex metaphor of identity loss. This becomes apparent in David Kepesh's perplexed odyssean search for identity both in America and Europe. In *The Professor of Desire*, the identity-crisis becomes more explicitly linked to questions of Jewish identity themes in Roth's novels. Roth metaphorically questions the boundaries of identity and selfhood, and in doing so he incorporates ethnic, gendered and sexual tropes under the broad theme of the location.

In his book, *Reading Myself and Others*, Roth expresses his bitter feelings of social rejection and inability to integrate into American society. He attempts to provoke pity for his personal and social problems:

In my own earliest work, I attempted to transform into fiction something of the small world in which I had spent the first eighteen years of my life. The stories did not draw so much upon immediate personal experience or the history of my own family as upon the ethos of my highly self-conscious Jewish neighborhood, which had been squeezed like some embattled little nation in among ethnic rivals and antagonists, peoples equally proud, ambitious, and xenophobic, and equally baffled and exhilarated by the experience of being fused into a melting pot. (172)

This extraction, however, sheds more light on the idea of vindication in the mélange of sex and agony that make up the formulation of sex as a metaphor of Roth's early fiction. In a metaphorical sense, the lost Jew is trying to find himself in diasporic European locale. He fails to reach self-identification, so he indulges in crazy hankering after sex as his only means of proving meaning to his existence. Interestingly enough, the sexual licentiousness takes place in Europe that once witnessed the annihilation of the Jewish identity. Kepesh is back in Europe to vindicate long-forgotten generations of a once-overridden Nazi Europe.

The humiliation of the women characters in *The Professor of Desire* supports the previous presumption as the misogynous nature of David Kepesh proves. The English and Swedish nationalities which are metaphorically impersonated in the character of the English Soho, "the first of [his] three sexual partners to date to have been born outside the continental United States" (28), and the Swedish Elisabeth and Birgitta are now paying dearly for their passivity and neglectful attitude towards the Jewish cause. Kepesh says:

I am in such an egoistical frenzy over this improbable thing that is happening to me, not just with one but with two Swedish (or, if you will, *European*) girls, that I do not see Elizabeth slowly going to pieces from the effort of being a fully participating sinner in our intercontinental ménage, a half of what can only be called my harem [...] until I came , and then the two girls huddled up together like playmates off in a tree house , or in a tent where there is just no room for another ... (31)

The women in this situation are humiliatingly trodden upon. They are looked down upon in Kepes's misogynous gaze as sexual objects made use of just for his sexual gratification and self-affirmation. Kepesh regards women as inferior human beings who cannot be elevated to higher moral or mental standards. Therefore, women are usually ridiculed and belittled. "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 "David harbors as a consequence of his marriage and its "mortifying" ending" (126). In the relationship between the American Jewish protagonist and non-Jewish women, he regards them as sex slaves and sex becomes a symbolic act of revenge against the non-Jewish society they belong to.

All in all, this proves that sex is the only means of achieving self-realization in part of David Kepesh, regardless of his academic accomplishment; hence, the metaphorical connotation of the title *The Professor of Desire*.

Likewise, in *The Dying Animal* readers may find that sex carries with it many metaphors and hidden meanings through which Philip Roth tries to communicate certain messages. Roth tackles sex metaphorically as he deals with multiple topics related

to gender issues; such as, the relationship between men and women—typically misogynous in nature. To begin with, the title of the novel is a metaphor in itself, and it has many metaphorical connotations, including the progression of Kepesh to his senility, which he refuses to acknowledge, especially with the presence of a beautiful and sexually active young woman in the prime of her femininity such as Consuela. Consuela represents the complete and beautiful image of the sexually attractive female that Kepesh has always drawn in his mind "a masterpiece of volupté" (34). Kepesh is highly fascinated with Consuela's breasts. For Kepesh, her body and breasts are a wonderful piece of art drawn by a skilled artist. Likewise, the breast is a continuation of the breast fetish in Roth's *The Breast*. Still, the breast is an important metaphor for the fetish breast of Consuela, the non-Jewish Cuban woman, with whom Kepesh feels superior. He is greatly impressed by her breast, which proves the idea of fetishism as a pivotal metaphorical element in *The Dying Animal*. Another metaphor in *The Dying Animal* is that of the libertine academic Kepesh, who is now over the age of sixty. He is unable to enter into a serious deep relationship with the young beautiful Consuela towards whom he shows sexual desire. Therefore, Consuela in Kepesh's view is not a fully-fleshed character but rather remains just a beautiful piece of art always drawn in his imagination.

Metaphorically speaking, Consuela is merely the embodiment of Kepesh's sexual desires and his attachment to the breast fetish. On one hand, Kepesh's relationship with Consuela remains insecure due to the fact that his sexual prowess is dying and she is a sexually active young woman. On the other hand, Kepesh is jealous because he has a rival at Consuela's age whom he fears would steal her away from him. Kepesh consoles himself as he says:

These girls with old gents don't do it despite the age—they're drawn to the age, they do it for the age. Why? In Consuela's case, because the vast difference in age gives her permission to submit, I think. My age and my status give her, rationally, the license to surrender, and surrendering in bed is a not unpleasant sensation. But simultaneously, to give yourself over intimately to a much, much older man provides this sort of younger woman with authority of a kind she cannot get in a sexual arrangement with a younger man. She gets both the pleasures of submission and the pleasures of mastery (26).

Therefore, at his old age, Kepesh cannot ensure for himself that he can sexually gratify Consuela. He is also unable to get attached to her family, so a kind of estrangement occurs between both of them. Therefore, when Consuela returns to Kepesh after a period of separation, he begins to take revenge on her, and his way of vindication against Consuela is metaphorical in nature to a great extent. Cape Jonathan contends:

Consuela, never fully alive to begin with, dwindles into literary device. Who is the dying animal? Ironically it is not the old man but the young girl, the inverted triumph of age over beauty. Yet in the book's last two pages, Consuela calls Kepesh. The operation is imminent, she is panicking, he wants to go to her. An unseen, unknown voice (the next girlfriend?) warns him: "Think about it. Think. Because if you go you're finished." And there you have Kepesh's dilemma. Freedom or attachment? (n.p)

To put this more accurately, Roth chooses to end Consuela's life instead of ending the life of his aged protagonist Kepesh or admitting his impotency. Instead, he chooses for her beautiful breast—the objectification of both Kepesh's sexual desire and his inability to satisfy that desire—to be inflicted with breast cancer. In other words, Consuela and her breast die instead of Kepesh himself being dead. The question here is who is The "Dying Animal," which the title of the novel bears? The metaphorical answer is Consuela. No wonder, Kepesh once addresses her saying, "die animal, die bitch"(92).

Significantly, many critics have found Kepesh to be an unabashed misogynist, while some seemed to find the elegiac tone of the novel's depiction of sexuality is more importantly expressive. Furthermore, one of the important symptoms of the misogyny of these Jewish male characters towards women is the striking exclusion of the female voice from their accounts in which they act as the sole spokesmen for their male authors. Thus, the male reader unconsciously shares the male protagonists' misogynous experiments, gazes with them at women who are ridiculed about their body and mind, accuses them of infidelity, and in some cases despises them because of their non-Jewish ethnicity. Meanwhile, females are never given the chance to defend their side. When Kepesh spots Consuela in one of his lectures, he claims to have been immediately attracted to her. Yet his desire is not really fired until he starts to analyze the sophisticated interplay of naiveté and self-awareness that he attributes to her character. In this situation, Consuela is the passive receptor of Kepesh's craziest licentious reveries. Thus, Consuela should not be considered a fully fleshed character, but rather a mere sexual fetish, the most important part of which is her bosom. This shows apparently in the following lines:

You see the cleavage immediately. And you see she knows it. You see, despite the decorum, the meticulousness, the cautiously soigné style—or because of them—that she’s aware of herself. She comes to the first class with the jacket buttoned over her blouse, yet some five minutes into the session, she has taken it off. When I glance her way again, I see that she’s put it back on. So you understand that she’s aware of her power but that she isn’t sure yet how to use it, what to do with it, how much she even wants it. That body is still new to her, she’s still trying it out, thinking it through, a bit like a kid walking the streets with a loaded gun and deciding whether he’s packing it to protect himself or to begin a life of crime. (3–4)

Presumably, Roth is still emphasizing the idea of Kepesh's sexual prowess and licentious nature in a continuation of a narrative motif that directly links *The Dying Animal* to the two novels under current investigation in this study. Though written in a style similar to that of *The Professor Desire*, the themes and metaphors in *The Dying Animal* definitely relate to *The Breast*. It is, in fact, an extended metaphor of the sexual prowess that contours the repeated depiction of Roth's main character David Kepesh in three novels as a sexually insatiable man forever hankering after sexual adventures for the sake of quenching his vengefulness.

The Dying Animal begins, for example, with Kepesh talking about the lure he derives from his public image as a cultural commentator on television. Kepesh reflects on the side effects of this role:

Over the past fifteen years, being cultural critic on the television program has made me fairly well known locally, and they're attracted to my class because of that. In the beginning, I didn't realize that talking on TV once a week for ten minutes could be so impressive as it turns out to be to these students. But they are helplessly drawn to celebrity, however inconsiderable mine might be. (1)

This passage reveals an undertone of narcissism in the guise of self-satisfaction and self-realization of Kepesh's own personality.

In a similar vein, Kepesh seeks extramarital-free sex without being emotionally attached to any female partner. This is closely related to the idea of sexual revolution as one of the important metaphors in *The Dying Animal*. Hence, women in Kepesh's misogynous point of view are mere tools for his own self-gratification without any emotional attachment. Since the sexual revolution of the 1960s, when he left his wife and child, Kepesh has experimented with living what he calls an "emancipated manhood," out of the yoke of marriage. Kepesh says, "[A] man wouldn't have two-thirds of the problems he has if he didn't venture off to get fucked. It's sex that disorders our normally ordered lives" (33).

Kepesh, whose academic status in New York City made him in constant contact with youth culture throughout the second half of the twentieth century, recognizes generational trends through changes in patterns of sexual gratification. The sexual revolution of the 1960s is a flashpoint in an ongoing struggle within American culture. Cutright claims that "Roth managed to use sexual frankness which was a product and a reflection on the Sexual Revolution known as liberation of sex. It was a social and

cultural movement that resulted in liberalized attitudes towards sex and morality" (25). In 1960, social norms were changing as sex became more widely discussed in society. The changes revealed that sex was entering the public domain, and sex rates, especially among young people could no longer be ignored. Sanford Pinsker argues that the theme of sexuality is part of "Roth's ongoing sense that puritanical America pits unbridled sexual freedom against forces of restraint" (n.p).

In this respect, the sexual revolution thus emerges in the novel as a key moment in which Kepesh's personal history metaphorically blends with the historical struggle between the two Americas:

People fifteen, twenty years younger than I, the privileged beneficiaries of the revolution, could afford to go through it unconsciously. [...] But I had to think. There I was, still in the prime of life and the country entering into this extraordinary time. Am I or am I not a candidate for this wild, sloppy, raucous repudiation, this wholesale wrecking of the inhibitive past? Can I master the discipline of freedom as opposed to the recklessness of freedom? How does one turn freedom into a system? (64)

Presumably, Kepesh's problem lies in his contradictory desire to transform freedom, the revolution, something that by its very nature is fluid and dynamic. Jesse Kavadlo categorizes *The Dying Animal* as one of several novels that he believes "have examined what might be called *post-post-sexual* revolution relationships between male professors and female students" (11).

Eventually, Philip Roth's early works, a semi-autobiographical reworking of his experiences as a teenager, ultimately deal with the dilemma of the central Jewish male

protagonists who are repeatedly caught in a tragic impasse between the demands of their social and religious affiliations and their insatiable desires for self-realization and gratification.

By using sex as a metaphor, Philip Roth succeeded in drawing the attention of the American society to his writings and achieving for his character David Kepesh through sex what he was not able to achieve for himself socially. That society looked down upon Kepesh and did not accept him, so he wanted to invade this society sexually through various promiscuous sexual relations with Jewish and non-Jewish women in an attempt to prove his subjectivity. The aim of these metaphorical writings is the vindication of the self against religious, familial, or social oppressive powers.

In conclusion, this paper hypothesizes that sex is used as a metaphor throughout Philip Roth's fictional sequel, known as the Kepesh Trilogy. Roth intends to present the inner struggles of his main Jewish characters through a metaphorical fictional presentation of their sexual perversion and debauchery that commonly prove to be acts of vindication against their social milieu. In the grotesque image of a male body entrapping himself in a female breast lurks the hidden desire to attack society by means of ineptness and perversion. In the wandering sexual adventures of an academic professor lies the secret meaning of the lost identity of a diasporic Jew whose sole means of conquering the world is sexual debauchery. The image of a waning sexual prowess is another metaphorical representation of the idea of the Jewish protagonist who is unwilling to admit his failings so he chooses to let others die for the sake of pertaining his false legacy of his Jewish-male-ethnic-intellectual superiority.

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ملخص

يعد أسلوب فيليب روث في الكتابة فريد من نوعه وخاصة في الطريقة التي يستخدم فيها لغة المجاز والتي تتبأ عن وعيه بتلك الصلة بينه ككاتب وصوته الخيالي. تهدف هذه الدراسة إلى تسليط الضوء على فكرة استخدام فيليب روث للجنس كاستعارة في رواياته الأولى. حيث أنه من الملاحظ أن الجنس عند فيليب روث هو مجرد استعاره يستخدمها كأداة للسرد المستتر الذي يعمل على إخفاء ذلك الغرور لدى ابطاله. ويتميز هذا السرد المجازي المستتر عند روث بالعديد من الجوانب: أحداها الكشف عن المعاني الحقيقية للتجارب الأوروبية الحديثة. والشئ الآخر هو نقل التجربة اليهودية للخوف والتحيز العنصري في أمريكا، على الرغم من أنه رفض ذات مرة أن يوصف بأنه كاتب يهودي. وباستخدام الجنس كاستعارة، نجح روث في تقديم الصراعات الداخلية لشخصياته اليهودية الرئيسية من خلال عرض خيالي مجازي لانحرافهم الجنسي وفجورهم والذي يحاول بدوره ان يثبت ان كل ذلك هو مجرد رد فعل انتقامي ضد محيطهم الاجتماعي. على سبيل المثال في تلك الصورة البشعة لجسد الذكر والذي يقع في شراك ندي أنثوي، تكمن الرغبة الخفية في مهاجمة المجتمع عن طريق عدم الكفاءة والشذوذ. ومن هنا يكمن المعنى المستتر للهوية المفقودة لليهودي الشتات الذي يعتبر الفسق الجنسي وسيلته الوحيدة لغزو العالم في تلك المغامرات الجنسية المتجولة لدى بطله الأستاذ الجامعي. إن صورة القدرة الجنسية التي بدأت في التهاوى بفعل الزمن هي تمثيل مجازي آخر لفكرة بطل الرواية اليهودي الذي لا يرغب في الاعتراف بإخفاقاته، لذلك فقد اختار ترك الآخرين يموتون من أجل ربط إرثه الزائف بتفوقه اليهودي-الذكوري-العريقي-الفكري.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الاستعارة، الجنس، التحول، الهوية اليهودية، الإزاحة، كره النساء، الانتقام للذات، التفكك، الهوس الجنسي (فتشية)، الثورة الجنسية.