
THE USE OF PERSONA TO FULFILL THE SOCIAL ROLE IN THE NOVEL *NO LONGER HUMAN* BY OSAMU DAZAI

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Abstract	Article Information
<p><i>This thesis aims to analyze the factors that shape the persona and how the persona functions to fulfill social roles in the novel No Longer Human by Osamu Dazai. The study has two main objectives, the first one is to identify the factors that creates the persona within the novel. The second to examine how the persona fulfills the social role within the novel. The research applies psychoanalytic theory, specifically Carl Jung's concept of the persona, along with Biddle's theory of social roles. Jung's theory is used to explore the formation and function of the persona in the narrative, while Biddle's framework is applied to analyze the types of social roles depicted in the novel. The study employs a qualitative descriptive method. The researcher found the factors that creates the persona as cultural influence, socialization and conditioning, desire for acceptance and belonging, self-presentation and impression management, personal aspirations and idealized self, and defense mechanism and coping strategies. These factors influence the existence of the persona, which is employed to fulfill the social roles represented in the novel, namely, the roles of clown, son, friend, lover, and outcast.</i></p> <p>Keywords: <i>Persona, Social Role, Psychoanalysis, Descriptive Qualitative</i></p>	<p><i>Received:</i> 05/11/2025</p> <p><i>Revised:</i> 06/11/2025</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 09/11/2025</p>

INTRODUCTION

Human beings are social creatures who continuously interact within different environments. In these interactions, individuals adjust their behaviour to meet social expectations, often presenting different sides of themselves according to their roles. This external presentation is what Carl Gustav Jung refers to as the *persona*, namely the social mask individuals wear to appear acceptable and appropriate in various contexts (Jung, 2015). The persona allows a person to adapt and maintain positive impressions, yet it can also distance the individual from their authentic self.

In literature, psychological dynamics such as persona, identity conflict, and self-presentation are commonly represented through narrative and character behaviour. Literary works reflect human experience and social reality (Klarer, 2004; Roberts & Jacobs, 1995). One literary text that strongly illustrates psychological struggle related to persona is *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai (1948/1958). The novel narrates the life of Oba Yozo, a young man who feels alienated and unable to function as “human,” and thus develops various masks to survive within society. He adopts humour and compliance to be accepted, yet these masks deepen his sense of disconnection, as shown when he states that he becomes “a jester” so that others would tolerate his presence (Dazai, 1958, p.20).

From a psychological literary perspective, Jungian psychoanalysis considers persona as one of the main archetypes constructed from unconscious structures. Meanwhile, Biddle’s theory of social role explains how behaviour is shaped by expectations attached to social positions (Biddle, 1979). Combining both theories offers a framework to investigate how persona is formed and how it functions to fulfil specific roles.

Therefore, this research examines how Yozo’s persona is constructed and how that persona is used to fulfil his social roles in the novel. This study focuses on identifying the factors that shape Yozo’s persona and analysing how those factors enable him to perform roles such as clown, son, friend, lover, and eventually outcast. By analysing persona through literary representation, this study highlights psychological conflict as reflected through character behaviour in fiction.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Psychology of Literature

Psychology of literature focuses on human consciousness as represented in texts, while social psychology analyzes how individuals relate to society and social groups. Wellek and Warren argue that literature and psychology are closely connected because both study human behavior, perceptions, desires, and conflicts. Literature reflects real human characteristics, and therefore can be a medium for understanding psychological dimensions of human life. In this study, this perspective forms the foundation for analyzing the protagonist’s persona.

Psychoanalysis

Carl Gustav Jung (1875-1961) is best known as the founder of Analytic Psychology, also known as Jungian Psychology. The basis of Jung’s system is called as psychic energy or Jung’s term for personality. In Jung’s model, the psyche consists of three components: the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious. The collective unconscious is considered the deepest layer of the psyche and contains inherited memories from human and pre-human ancestors. This concept is one of the most distinctive and controversial parts of Jung’s theory, because it proposes that universal human experiences are passed down across generations.

Carl Jung's Psychoanalysis

Jung's psychoanalytic theory offers a broad symbolic approach to understanding the human psyche, contrasting Freud's focus on sexuality and childhood influences. Jung divides the psyche into three interacting components—the ego, the personal unconscious, and the collective unconscious—which together shape human identity and behavior. In literary analysis, this framework is useful because it allows characters to be interpreted not only as individuals but also as symbolic representations of universal psychological patterns

1. The Ego

The ego is the center of consciousness and contains the thoughts, feelings, memories, and perceptions a person is aware of. It forms the sense of "I," yet represents only a small portion of the whole psyche. In literature, the ego helps explain how characters understand themselves and relate to their surroundings.

2. Personal Unconscious

Personal unconscious, which stores forgotten or repressed experiences unique to each individual. This layer contains complexes—emotionally charged ideas formed from past experiences—that can influence behavior and cause inner conflict. In literary analysis, these complexes help explain characters' irrational or contradictory actions.

3. Collective Unconscious

Collective unconscious, which is inherited and shared by all humans. It consists of archetypes—universal patterns such as the Hero, Shadow, Trickster, or Mother—that shape human responses and appear across myths, art, dreams, and stories. These archetypal patterns also influence the formation of the persona, the social "mask" individuals use to fulfill expected social roles.

Archetype by Jung

Jung's concept of archetype refers to universal patterns or modes of functioning that originate from the collective unconscious. Archetypes are not inherited ideas, but innate behavioral tendencies that shape how humans perceive and respond to life experiences. They appear symbolically through recurring images, themes, dreams, fantasies, myths, and cultural narratives. Jung also called them "primordial images," because they reflect deep psychological structures shared across humanity. These archetypal patterns help explain why similar symbolic forms appear in different societies. Among the many archetypes Jung identified, several major ones—such as the persona, anima and animus, the shadow, and the self—are regarded as most influential in shaping the human psyche.

Persona by Jung

The persona, in Jungian theory, is the social mask individuals adopt to meet expectations and fulfill roles in society. It represents the public identity presented to others, which may differ from a person's true inner self. Jung argues that the persona is not an authentic expression of individuality, but a compromise between the individual and social norms about

how one “should appear.” In daily life, people adjust their behavior to fit roles—such as worker, student, or family member—which shows how persona functions to maintain social acceptance. Although persona can help individuals navigate social environments, it also becomes problematic when one over-identifies with it and loses connection to their genuine self. In *No Longer Human*, the protagonist illustrates this by performing a clown-like persona to avoid rejection, demonstrating how persona is used as a survival strategy in social interaction.

1. Cultural Influence

Persona is shaped by cultural norms, values, and expectations. Jung explains that the persona serves as a tool for social adaptation, helping individuals present an acceptable image that aligns with societal standards. Although archetypes are universal, cultural context determines how these patterns appear in behavior and social roles. Different cultures define what is considered appropriate, which pressures individuals to adopt personas that match these expectations. This creates tension between external collective norms and a person’s inner self. Modern scholars further emphasize that persona is not only psychological, but also a culturally constructed expression of social demands.

2. Socialization and Conditioning

From childhood, individuals are conditioned to learn acceptable behavior within their society, and this socialization shapes the development of the persona. By internalizing social values, people form a socially acceptable mask to gain approval. However, Jung warned that when someone becomes overly identified with this mask, they may lose connection with their authentic self, because the persona becomes merely a fragment of the collective psyche rather than a true expression of individuality. Later scholars also support the idea that social conditioning reinforces the tension between genuine identity and conformity.

3. Desire for Acceptance and Belonging

Humans naturally seek acceptance and belonging, and this desire motivates them to form personas that match social expectations. To avoid rejection, people adjust their behavior, attitudes, and appearance to gain approval from others. Jung explained that the persona functions as a bridge to fit into society. However, when acceptance is based only on this mask, individuals risk losing connection with their true identity, which can cause emptiness and alienation. In *No Longer Human*, Yozo’s use of humor to be accepted illustrates this conflict—he gains social approval, yet internally feels disconnected from his real self.

4. Self-presentation and Impression Management

Self-presentation involves selectively displaying certain traits while hiding others in order to create a positive impression. Jung emphasized that the persona is shaped both consciously and unconsciously to project desirable images that fit social

expectations. Although this helps individuals navigate social situations, over-investment in the idealized mask can weaken one's authentic self. As Jung warned, the pressure to maintain a socially pleasing image can lead to psychological strain, anxiety, and even neurosis.

5. Personal Aspiration and Idealized Self

Persona formation is not only influenced by social demands, but also by a person's own ideals and aspirations. Individuals often create a persona that represents the version of themselves they want others to see—such as being competent, attractive, or confident. Jung acknowledged that inner goals also shape the mask one presents to society. However, if the persona is constructed mainly around an idealized self-image, it can create a gap between who the person appears to be and who they actually are. Jung warned that this can lead to “inflation,” where the ego becomes overly identified with the mask and loses connection to the unconscious, resulting in a distorted sense of self.

6. Defense Mechanism and Coping Strategies

Persona can also develop from defense mechanisms and coping strategies used to avoid rejection, conflict, or emotional vulnerability. Jung viewed the persona as a protective barrier that shields the ego. However, when individuals depend too heavily on this mask, authentic parts of the self become repressed and accumulate in the unconscious as the shadow, which may later appear in harmful or self-destructive forms. Therefore, the persona is both necessary for social adaptation and potentially harmful when overused. These combined factors show how social and psychological pressures contribute to persona formation, as illustrated by Yozo in *No Longer Human*, who becomes trapped within his own mask.

Social Psychology

Social psychology studies how individuals think, feel, and behave in relation to their social environment. Scholars such as Allport and Aronson highlight that social influence occurs not only through direct interaction, but also through implied expectations embedded in cultural norms. For this research, social psychology supports the analysis of how persona functions in society. Because persona is shaped by socialization and cultural pressure, it can be understood as a psychological response to social demands. Therefore, integrating social psychology with Jung's persona theory allows this study to examine how Oba Yozo in *No Longer Human* constructs and modifies his persona to fulfill expected social roles.

Social Role by B. J Biddle

Human beings naturally interact with different social groups, and in doing so, they take on different social roles. Each role—such as being a student, manager, husband, or friend—comes with specific expectations, which influence how one behaves in different environments. Within social psychology, role theory suggests that behaviour is shaped through

role playing (performing behaviours learned from others) and role taking (internalizing expectations communicated by society) (Biddle, 1979). As individuals enter different contexts, they continuously adjust themselves to meet these social expectations.

In *No Longer Human*, this process is evident in Yozo, who adopts the role of a jester to be accepted by others. Although he is not genuinely humorous, he constructs a persona to avoid rejection. This supports the connection between Jung's persona theory and role theory: people adapt their "mask" according to the social role they must perform. Yozo's reputation as a brilliant student—rather than the son of a wealthy family—also reflects how his persona is shaped by aspiration and the need to fulfil expected roles. Therefore, persona and social role are closely related, and both are central to understanding Yozo's behaviour in the novel.

Persona and Social Role

By combining Jung's persona theory with Biddle's social role theory, Yōzō's mask becomes clearly role-dependent rather than purely personal. His need for acceptance pushes him to adopt roles—such as the clown or the obedient son—that allow him to function socially but simultaneously disconnect him from authenticity. The clown persona reflects the trickster archetype (Jung, 1959), where humor becomes a defensive strategy rather than genuine expression. Thus, the interaction between persona and social role explains why Yōzō's social adaptation results not in belonging, but in a deeper sense of alienation—leading him to feel "no longer human."

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative descriptive method because the main data is a literary text. The approach applied is psychology of literature, focusing on Jung's theory of persona to analyze how the persona functions in fulfilling social roles in *No Longer Human*. The primary data is the English translation of the novel, while secondary data consists of books, journals, and related theories. Data was collected by close reading, marking relevant excerpts, reviewing supporting literature, and coding quotations (e.g., P,20).

Data analysis involved three steps: identifying relevant text, codifying it, and interpreting it using Jung's concepts to answer the research problems. Trustworthiness is supported through theory triangulation, using multiple theoretical references and direct textual evidence to strengthen validity of interpretation.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Factors That Create Persona

Jung defines the persona as the "mask" people use to perform different roles in society. This mask helps individuals adapt, gain approval, and fulfil social expectations. In the novel, Yozo's persona is supported by several factors: cultural norms, social conditioning, the need for acceptance, impression management, personal ideals, and defense/coping mechanisms. These factors work together and strongly influence how Yozo constructs his social

masks. Therefore, these components play a major role in forming the persona he uses to meet social roles and survive socially.

1. Cultural Influence (CI)

Japanese cultural norms such as *honne* (inner feelings) and *tatemae* (public façade) push Yozo to hide his true emotions and present socially acceptable behavior. Family hierarchy and strict etiquette further reinforce obedience. These cultural expectations shape Yozo's persona as a defensive mask rather than an expression of his authentic self.

“Again I never once answered back everything said to me by my family. The least word of reproof struck with me with the force of a thunderbolt and drove me almost out of my head.” (Dazai, p.18)

This shows Yozo's internalization of cultural pressure to remain silent and obedient, even when he suffers. His silence reflects *tatemae*—the social façade expected in a hierarchical household. According to Jung, this kind of adaptation forms the persona: Yozo suppresses his *honne* to avoid conflict and maintain harmony. Thus, cultural norms become a major factor in shaping his persona.

2. Socialization and Conditioning (SC)

Individuals are socialized from a young age and learn what is considered acceptable within their culture or society. While learning, an individual adjusts themselves to fit the society. This process is called conditioning that influences the development of the persona.

“I dreaded mealtime more each day. I would sit there at the end of the table in the dimly lit room and trembling all over with the cold, I would lift a few morsels of food to my mouth and push them in.” (Dazai, P.14)

The excerpt above shows the situation when Yozo feels dreaded by the mealtime on the dining table. Even though he feels uncomfortable he keeps trying to adjust himself in order to fit in his family. He learns about the conditions around his household and learns about the things that are acceptable in his family. Socialization teaches Yozo not to resist but to comply, reinforcing Jung's view that the persona arises as an adaptation to what is acceptable in the collective environment.

3. Desire for Acceptance and Belonging (DAB)

As a social being, humans have a natural desire to be accepted and to belong in a social group or social environment. This desire for social acceptance often drives an individual to create a persona to fulfill the social expectations.

“I have always shook with fright before human beings. Unable as I was to feel the least particle of confidence in my ability to speak and act like a human being” (Dazai, P.20)

The excerpt above is talking about what Yozo feel about being a human, he feels scared about the idea of how human being a human and he feels like he is not a human because he was feeling unconfident to speak and act like a human being. This fact shown Yozo's trembling illustrates his desperate need to belong. Jung saw the persona as a bridge to society where we wear it to gain acceptance. However, Yozo never achieves confidence in this role. His persona, the clown is built to simulate belonging. Jung's theory explains this as the persona functioning as a social bridge, even though Yozo feels inauthentic, he still uses it to appear "human" enough to be accepted.

4. Self-presentation and Impression Management (SI)

While the persona represents the social mask. Individuals consciously and unconsciously select and emphasize certain aspects of their personality while downplaying or concealing other aspects to create a favorable impression on others.

"I have never been aware that my stomach was empty. When as a boy I returned home from school, the people at home would make a great fuss over me. "You must be hungry. We remember what it's like, how terribly hungry you feel by the time you get from school. How about some jelly beans? There's cake and biscuits too." Seeking to please, as I invariably did, I would mumble that I was hungry" (Dazai, P.13)

The excerpt above shows the situation when Yozo just came back from school. People are usually feel hungry when they came back from school, but it different with Yozo, Yozo actually not aware about being hungry. On the excerpt above the people in Yozo's house was offering some snacks for Yozo because they thought Yozo was hungry. When the real thing, Yozo is not hungry at all. But seeking to please, he mumbled that he was hungry just to gain a favorable impression.

5. Personal Aspirations and Idealized Self (PI)

An individual also may construct a persona that reflects their desired self-image or the image they wish to show to the world. Yet, the persona is not always shaped by external influence, the persona also could be shaped by personal aspirations and idealized self.

"My apprehension on discovering that my concept of happiness seemed to be completely at variance with that of everyone else was so great as to make me toss sleeplessly and groan night after night in my bed. It drove me indeed to the brink of lunacy"(Dazai, P.15)

The excerpt above show about Yozo's personal aspiration. That can be seen by the way how Yozo was thinking about the concept of happiness that is different with everyone else's concept of happiness that makes him drove crazy by thinking about it. Yozo aspires to experience happiness, yet realizes his definition does not match society's. His persona forms around a false self that tries to appear "normal."

Jung would call this an inflated idealized self, where one wears a mask to match the collective ideal of happiness.

6. Defense Mechanism and Coping Strategies (DC)

An individual develops the persona that is influenced by the defense mechanism and coping strategies to navigate their surroundings social situation. These mechanisms can help an individual to manage their anxiety or to avoid conflicts. Carl Jung describes the persona not only as a social adaptation but also as a defensive shield against anxiety and rejection. For Yozo, the clown persona is exactly that: a coping strategy to mask fear, pain, and alienation

“All I feel are the assaults of apprehension and terror at the thought that I am the only one who is entirely unlike the rest. It is almost impossible for me to converse with other people. What should I talk about, how should I say it?—I don’t know.” (Dazai, P.17)

The excerpt above show Yozo’s defense mechanism and coping strategies at the time when Yozo still a child. Yozo feels terrorized with his own thought that he is different with anybody else. He feels troubled to socialize with other people and feels confused. This shows Yozo’s deep social anxiety. His defense mechanism is withdrawal into silence or adopting artificial roles. Jung’s persona theory applies here: the mask shields Yozo from unbearable difference but simultaneously prevents real communication.

The Use of Persona to Fulfil the Social Role

Social role refers to the positions individuals occupy in society (such as student, son, friend), each of which carries expectations about how one should behave. Jung argues that these roles influence self-perception, because the persona is the mask used to perform these roles in front of others. Thus, persona and social role are interconnected: the persona functions as the “face” needed to meet social demands.

In *No Longer Human*, Yozo repeatedly shifts persona depending on the role he is expected to play. Throughout the narrative he performs at least five major roles: the clown, the dutiful son, the friend, the lover, and eventually the outcast/addict. Each persona is not freely chosen, but constructed to survive social judgement. The following discussion categorizes excerpts based on how each role shapes his persona.

1. The Role of a Clown

The clown is one of Yozo’s main social roles. He deliberately constructs a humorous persona so others will see him as entertaining and harmless. This role is shaped by key persona factors—especially acceptance, socialization, and impression management. By acting funny, Yozo hides his true emotions and avoids judgment. Thus, the clown persona becomes a strategy of social survival rather than genuine self-expression. Socialization and conditioning shape Yozo’s clown persona. This factor shows how he learns to adjust himself to avoid rejection.

“Before anyone realized it, I had become an accomplished clown, a child who never spoke a single truthful word.” (Dazai, p.18)

This excerpt shows that Yozo’s clown role is not natural, but a learned response to fear and embarrassment. Instead of showing his real feelings, he performs humor to survive socially. In Jung’s terms, the clown becomes his persona — a mask formed through repeated social interactions, used to protect himself and to meet social expectations.

2. The Role of Dutiful Son

Cultural influence also shapes Yozo’s persona when performing the role of a dutiful son. Coming from a wealthy, traditional family, he is expected to be disciplined, polite, and obedient. To match these expectations, Yozo adopts a persona that follows household rules and suppresses his true feelings.

“As a child the most painful part of the day was unquestionably mealtime, especially in my own home.” (Dazai, p.13)

This excerpt shows how strict family routines — such as scheduled meals — force Yozo to conform to cultural etiquette. Even though he feels discomfort, he must obey. In Jung’s view, this creates a persona that hides inner anxiety while performing outward obedience. Thus, Japanese cultural norms become a major factor that forms Yozo’s “dutiful son” mask.

3. The Role of a Friend

As a “friend,” Yozo is expected to be reciprocal and sincere, but his persona makes this role unstable. Instead of genuine connection, he performs friendliness only to avoid rejection. His friendship becomes a mask, not authenticity.

“I felt as though I had been deprived of some elementary miracle, as though I were some alien species of creature, and I trembled with fear before human beings.” (Dazai, p.19–20)

This excerpt shows that Yozo feels fundamentally different and fears human interaction. To avoid rejection, he performs friendliness — not because he feels affection, but because he wants to belong. According to Jung, this is a persona driven by insecurity. According to Biddle, Yozo fails to meet the normative expectations of friendship because the interaction is based on masking rather than sincerity, which ultimately reinforces his isolation.

4. The Role of a Lover

In romantic relationships, Yozo performs a persona rather than showing genuine emotion, offering forced affection and compliance instead of true connection. Jung would argue this blocks individuation, while Biddle notes that the role is performed superficially, creating a gap between expectation and reality.

“She bought me presents, seemingly at random, and offered them with the words, ‘I wish you would think of me as your real sister.’”

Wincing at the affection I would answer 'I do,' and force a sad little smile. I was afraid of angering her, and my only thought was to temporize somehow and put her off." (Dazai, p.76)

Yozo's behavior is motivated by fear of rejection, not genuine feeling. His "sad little smile" functions as a persona, masking inner discomfort. In the lover role, this prevents true intimacy, illustrating how reliance on a social mask can block authentic emotional expression, as Jung's theory suggests.

5. The Role of an Addict and Social Outcast

Later, Yozo becomes an addict and social outcast, a role imposed by stigma and social rejection rather than choice. Biddle's framework explains this through social labeling, while Jung shows the collapse of adaptive personas. With his clown and dutiful son masks failing, Yozo resorts to maladaptive coping strategies—alcohol, drugs, and isolation—illustrating how failed role performance erodes identity.

"As long as I can make them laugh, it doesn't matter how, I'll be all right. If I succeed in that, the human beings probably won't mind it too much if I remain outside their lives." (Dazai, p.20)

Yozo's desire for acceptance drives him to maintain the clown persona, gaining superficial acknowledgment while remaining isolated. In Biddle's terms, he performs the entertainer role to obtain minimal social approval, yet this partial acceptance deepens his marginalization. Jung would interpret the persona as a fragile protective mask that ultimately fails to reconcile his inner alienation. The clown persona is a strategic mask that secures minimal social approval while avoiding conflict. Driven by fear rather than authenticity, it suppresses Yozo's true self. Jung would view this as over-identification with a role that blocks individuation, while Biddle would see it as superficially meeting social expectations yet internalizing deviant labeling, ultimately leading to his outcast status.

CONCLUSION

This research concludes that in *No Longer Human* by Osamu Dazai, Yozo's social roles are mediated through his persona, shaped by cultural norms, social conditioning, personal aspirations, desire for acceptance, and coping strategies. His persona allows him to navigate social interactions but suppresses authentic self-expression, creating tension between his inner life and outward behavior. As a dutiful son, Yozo conforms to family rules and cultural expectations, demonstrating obedience and politeness while hiding his true feelings. This aligns with Jung's idea that over-identification with the persona overshadows the self, and Biddle's view that social expectations are superficially met without resolving internal conflict. In the friend role, Yozo's calculated warmth and gestures conceal resentment and insecurity. His persona mediates social interactions but prevents genuine connections, reinforcing isolation. In romantic relationships, he performs affection and compliance rather than expressing true emotion, reflecting the protective yet restrictive nature of the persona.

When earlier masks collapse, Yozo becomes an addict and social outcast. Maladaptive coping strategies such as alcohol, drugs, and humor temporarily manage social expectations but deepen alienation and identity erosion. Jung interprets this as the persona failing to protect the self, while Biddle emphasizes the impact of social labeling on deviant identity formation. Overall, Yozo's experiences illustrate the destructive tension between persona and true self. While the persona enables social survival, over-reliance leads to anxiety, alienation, and loss of authenticity. The novel highlights the tragic consequences of navigating society through masks, showing that external conformity comes at the cost of internal fragmentation and profound isolation.

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