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RE-READING THE POETRY OF EDGAR ALLAN POE THROUGH THE LENS OF CARL GUSTAV JUNG'S PERSONA, SHADOW, AND EGO

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Abstract:

This paper examines a reading of Edgar Allan Poe's poetry through the psychoanalytical lens of Carl Jung, focusing on the Jungian concepts of the persona, shadow, and ego. Focusing on three of Poe's seminal poems, namely, "The Raven", "Annabel Lee", and "Ulalume" this study examines how the poet externalizes the inner workings of the human psyche, particularly in response to love, loss, and death. The study highlights how the persona represents the outward face presented to society, the shadow reveals suppressed fears and desires, and the ego mediates between these forces. Through a close reading of the poems and analysis of imagery, symbolism, and emotional intensity, this paper demonstrates how the works of Poe portray the struggles of identity and self-understanding, revealing the timeless tension between the conscious and the unconscious self of the mind.

Keywords: Annabel, Lee, Jungian, Ulalume, Persona, Shadow, Ego, Raven.

Introduction:

Edgar Allan Poe is one of the greatest American writers, with the exceptional ability to portray the human mind in his works. Although much scholarship has been done on his short stories, even his poems reveal the genius of Poe in describing the intricacies of the human psyche. Themes of death, loss, and the supernatural, along with the psychological complexities and vivid imagery, are hallmarks of his fascination with the human mind and the mysteries of death and loss, as seen in works like "The Raven", "Annabel Lee", and "Ulalume".

Poe's poems, particularly the external elements of the setting (the ghost, haunted house, mysterious landscape), have the power to evoke terror, but so do the internal conflicts of his characters. In his poems the horror elements are used as metaphors to indicate the psychological and emotional condition of the narrator. Poe's exploration of psychological themes in his poems is a departure from the external terror that was his tradition. His works display the inner workings of the mind, focusing on the theme of obsession, madness, grief and memory. This mental energy fits into the modern psychological thriller which only deals with the psychology of its characters as they struggle with their own internal demons and external pressures thrust upon them. Although each poem is different in style and tone, it is all about the psychological consequence of loss, identity and the forgotten self.

Carl Gustav Jung's psychoanalytical framework with its unique structure of ego, persona, and shadow provides a compelling lens through which these poems would revisit and examine. In Jungian psychology, the ego is the centre of consciousness, the part of the psyche that experiences and organises reality; the persona is the mask that one puts to the society, the perfectly made version of oneself which is mainly shaped by societal, cultural, and often the expectations have by the families; the shadow comprises those part of oneself that are denied and kept under repression and often carried the content of fear, desire, guilt, or unacceptable impulses. When the balance among these three is disturbed, psychological tension arises which then manifest into what a literary speaker might feel as obsession, grief, madness, or longing.

These tensions are evident in different ways in the three poems selected for this paper. In the poem, "The Raven," the speaker is not only haunted by the unknown bird, but is also haunted by his own darkness that keeps him from being able to move on from his beautiful wife Lenore. In "Annabel Lee," the persona's voice holds on to an idealized image of eternal love, despite the disruptions of death and the deepening of the devotion. In "Ulalume", a trip to the ghostly land highlights the precarious fight of the ego to keep an awareness of what's around. Meanwhile, the unconscious lures the speaker back into a repressed past grief. These poems demonstrate how well Poe was able to capture the movements of the mind in poetic form and how shadow, persona, and the ego are intertwined and weave in together. This paper argues that in "The Raven", "Annabel Lee", and "Ulalume", Poe dramatizes and shows how the characters perfectly reflect the persona, shadow, and ego of the collective unconscious of Carl Jung. The analysis will reveal the function of the poetic voices as a mask of devotion and a mirror of repression within Poe's exploration of the themes of grief, unsettled identity and forces encountered by the unconscious.

The Raven – Shadow, the darkness that looms:

Edgar Allan Poe's "The Raven" (1845) is sometimes celebrated for its haunting atmosphere, hypnotic rhythm, and the refrain of "Nevermore" that appears to repeat in the minds of readers; yet, behind the exquisitely contrived Gothic surface lurks a deep psychological struggle in its characters. The poem is a story of loss, but it's also a symbolic battle between the conscious self and the hidden, darkest aspects. "The Raven" fits perfectly with the concept of shadow since the raven itself represents the epitome of shadow:

a force that arises unbidden, resists rational explanation, and eventually overpowers the weak ego of the speaker. The shadow, as described by Carl Jung is the unconscious aspect of our character/personality that is not our ideal self; the things we reject, the fears we deny, the emotions we are not willing to acknowledge. The speaker of "The Raven" already grieved for the loss of his beloved Lenore when the shadow entered in: "Once upon a midnight dreary, while I pondered, weak and wary" (Poe, line 1). He's tired and distracted, and his tiredness and distraction suggest cracks in his psyche, from which the shadow surfaces in the form of a host of mysterious tapping visitors. The moment the raven comes into the spot, the bird is associated with the shadow. It is black, nocturnal, and comes in the "bleak December" (Poe, line 7), and is a sign of both darkness and psychological darkness. PoemAnalysis states that the raven is actually a "projection of the narrator's grief and despair" ("The Raven: Poems Analysis"). This is an interpretation that resonates and ties in with Jung's concept of the shadow appearing externally when the emotions are repressed. Reason is not enough to keep him from falling asleep, as the raven perches upon a bust of Pallas (wisdom itself), as Poe states in line 41. Rather, shadow reigns at the top reason, taking precedence over logic and order. Constantly, the bird says, "Nevermore," which is one of the most distinct voices of the shadow. The raven repeats the same answer to every question asked by the speaker, including one about meeting Lenore, one about taking the pain away and one about finding comfort in the afterlife. The refrain "a reminder of the permanence of loss and hopelessness" ("Themes in The Raven") is from SparkNotes. Jungianly speaking, the shadow is absolute. It challenges the desperate rationalizations, or even flights of fancy, that the speaker's ego is making, and forces him to acknowledge that his Lenore is gone, and that there is no hope. The shadow grows in strength and intensity as the poem progresses. The speaker is polite towards the bird, but his voice turns from curious to pleading to despair: "Though thy crest be shorn and shaven, though" (Poe, line 45). The change of his tone indicates the growing impact of the shadow on the self's conscious part. According to LitCharts, the raven "comes to represent the speaker's grief itself, a grief that he cannot escape". The Raven Summary & Analysis. The shadow has come out and is not suppressed, but it is manifested in a bird that is unwilling to leave.

One of the most striking symbolic moments occurs near the poem's conclusion:

"And the lamplight o'er him, streaming, throws his shadow on the floor;
And my soul from out that shadow, that lies floating on the floor
Shall be lifted nevermore!" (Poe, lines 107-109).

Here, the shadow of the raven is no longer metaphorical but physical, covering the soul of the speaker. According to SparkNotes, this final shadow represents "the speaker's surrender to despair" ("Symbols in The Raven"). From the Jungian lens, the images illustrate how the shadow, once repressed, has overtaken the self entirely. The ego has collapsed under its weight, and integration is impossible. The poem ends not with reconciliation but with domination; thus, the shadow has consumed the psyche.

The raven's staying is proof of this loss, "Still is sitting, still is sitting" (Poe, line 103). The shadow does not depart once it is acknowledged but instead, it remains as a never-ending, enduring presence. LitCharts says that this ending represents "the permanence of grief and memory" ("The Raven Symbol & Analysis"). The speaker of "The Raven" resists the shadow, which must be confronted and integrated, Jung says. Rather, he casts the shadow out as a demonic bird, and lets it consume him. His soul from out that shadow will be lifted never more. Reading "The Raven" in the context of the shadow in Jungian psychology, one can see how the poet, Poe, ushered in the unconscious through his powerful words. The raven is becoming not just merely a Gothic bird but a psychological force, that is, the manifestation of despair, loss, and fear

that the speaker cannot take in and fully understand into his conscious self. His downfall is not coming in contact with the shadow, but not living it. Instead of progress, he completely gives way to the darkness, and the reader is left with an image of what it means when the darkness prevails over the conscious self.

In this way, this poem becomes a timeless representation of the concept of Carl Jung. The raven symbolizes the inevitability of the shadow's return, the impossibility of escaping grief by repression, and the destructive potential of failing to integrate the darkest part of ourselves. The shadow is not only an enemy but also a truth-teller, and in "The Raven", its truth is unbearable. The shadow is always with us, whether we are aware of it or not; either way, it's part of us and always present in our unconscious. Rather than ignoring its existence and being consumed by it just as the speaker of the poem had done, one should embrace its existence.

Annabel Lee – Persona, the mask of self:

Edgar Allan Poe's "Annabel Lee" (1849) is often remembered as a haunting elegy of love and loss. Yet beyond its romantic exterior, the poem reflects Carl Jung's concept of the persona, the social mask, and the individual wears a mask of the self in front of others. As Encyclopedia Britannica explains, the persona is "the personality that an individual projects to others, as distinguished from the authentic self" ("Persona| Identity, Self-Image, Self-Concept"). Jung considered this mask to be necessary for functioning in society, but he also warned that over-identification with the persona can prevent deeper psychological growth. In "Annabel Lee", the speaker of Poe faces this tension that he presents himself as the figure of eternal devotion, creating an identity that is socially recognizable and which both conceals and sustains him in his grieving and its aftermath.

From the outset, the poem frames Annabel Lee as the central protagonist in a story that feels larger than life. The speaker recalls:

" It was many and many a year ago,
/ In a kingdom by the sea,
/ That a maiden there lived whom you may know/
By the name of Annabel Lee" (Poe, lines 1-4).

The fairy-tale tone, with its distant setting of a "kingdom by the sea", immediately changes and portrays the relationship into a myth. Rather than portraying Annabel Lee as a complex human being, the speaker shapes her into a symbol, a role that enhances his own projected identity. This aligns perfectly with the view of persona of Jung as a contract design for others to see. According to Simply Psychology, the persona is "the outward face we present to the world, designed to make a particular impression while concealing the real nature of the individual" (McLeod). By narrating his story in this stylized manner, the speaker is adopting the mask of an idealized lover.

The strength of this persona is most visible when the speaker explains his insistence on the exceptional nature of their bond:

" But we loved with a love that was more than love—
/ I and my Annabel Lee" (Poe, lines 9-10).

This repetition of the word "love" creates a performative declaration. It becomes a public assertion less than that of a private confession, almost as if the speaker is addressing an imaginary audience, insisting upon the uniqueness of his role as a lover of Annabel Lee. According to Jung, it is believed that such over-identification with the persona often occurs when the social mask an individual wears becomes confused with the conscious self. In the case of "Annabel Lee", the speaker risks collapsing his genuine grief of losing his lover into the perfect persona of "the devoted lover", clinging to the mask he created and used rather than acknowledging his vulnerability.

Annabel Lee herself is presented through the same lens throughout the whole poem. She is described as a "child" who existed only "to love and be loved by me" (Poe, line 8). This portrayal erases her individuality, thus turning her into a projection that validates her persona. According to Wikipedia's overview of the concept, the persona "can be mistaken for the whole of the personality, leading individuals to see others only through the roles they assign them" ("Persona psychology"). In Poe's poem, Annabel Lee becomes the persona's mirror, reflecting back the image of the speaker as an eternally devoted one. However, as readers, we learn almost nothing of her inner life.

The tension between reality and the persona in the poem intensifies when death intrudes. Instead of confronting the death and loss directly, the speaker insists that cosmic forces are responsible:

" The angels, not half so happy in Heaven,
/ Went envying her and me" (Poe, lines 21-22).

This claim attributes Annabel Lee's death to supernatural envy rather than natural mortality. The persona that the speaker created shields him from the painful reality of grief, allowing him to maintain the story of eternal love rather than facing the emotional collapse and losing his authentic conscious self, forgetting the real grief and pain of mourning for his lost love. The Society of Analytical Psychology explains that the persona is "a compromise formation between the individual and society" ("Analytical Psychology– and Overview of Jungian Psychology"). However, when it hardens into a whole identity, it blocks the individual from growth and causes them to lose their true identity in the process.

The poem's final stanza reveals the cost of this over-identification. The speaker said:

" Neither the angels in the Heaven above,
/ Nor the demons down under the sea,
/ Can ever dissever my soul from the soul
/ Of the beautiful Annabel Lee" (Poe, lines 31-34).

These lines demonstrate not only loyalty but also an almost obsessive refusal to let go. The image of the speaker lying beside the tomb of Annabel Lee by the sea conveys the speaker's total absorption in his persona. He has become inseparable from the role of the eternal mourners. Instead of integrating grief and moving forward, the speaker's identity is locked into a mask that imprisons him.

Thus, "Annabel Lee" becomes not only an elegy but also a revealing study of the function of the persona of Jung. The poem shows how the persona can protect the individual by creating for them a socially acceptable role. In the case of "Annabel Lee," the role of the devoted lover is evident, but it also highlights how this perspective can change reality, reducing others to symbols and emotional growth, ultimately wiping out the true identity of the self. In this sense, the speaker of Poe carries the warning of Jung that

when a person correlates fully with the persona, it leads to stagnation rather than transformation. The mask, once mistaken for the self, becomes both a refuge and a cage.

Ulalume— Ego; the center of the self:

Edgar Allan Poe's poem "Ulalume" (1847) stands out as one of his most psychologically dense, disturbed, and symbolically layered works. While often interpreted as a meditation on grief and memory, the poem can also be understood through the lens of Carl Jung's concept of the ego, the central structure of the conscious mind. According to Encyclopedia Britannica, the ego in Jungian theory is "the center of consciousness, the part of the psyche concerned with perceiving, thinking, feeling, and remembering" ("Ego Psychology"). It mediates between the inner world and the external reality, seeking identity and continuity in the self. In "Ulalume", Poe dramatizes his speaker who struggles to integrate his conscious awareness with the unconscious pill of grief and memory. The poem thus becomes a vivid symbol and representation of the role of ego in navigating loss and the search for the self to continue living, as well as the psychological conflict.

The opening lines establish the dreamlike quality of the poem, as the speaker describes wandering through a desolate October landscape:

" The skies they were ashen and sober;
/ The leaves they were crisped and sere—
/ The leaves they were withering and sere" (Poe, lines 1-3).

This repetitive, almost hypnotic rhythm suggests a consciousness caught in a loop, unable to move forward. In the Jungian framework, the ego organizes conscious perception; however, in the poem, it appears fragmented and trapped in melancholic imagery. The barren setting mirrors the internal bartender of the conscious mind of the speaker. As Simply Psychology explains, the ego is "responsible for our sense of identity and continuity, the part of us that experiences the world directly" (McLeod). In this poem, that identity is precarious, overshadowed by unresolved mourning.

The speaker tells us that he is not alone in his journey, but has his psyche with him throughout the poem. This may represent an internal struggle, with the speaker's conscious mind engaging with the voice of his soul, whether it is an admonition or a misdirection. The way they go goes down to a strange place where his dear Ulalume is buried, but the speaker does not know this end of the way until at the close of the poem. The profound irony of the poem is the fact that the ego is unaware of the unconscious forces that drive the way it travels. According to Jung, the person's ego is not the entire Psyche, but only the conscious part, and that there might be other things going on in the unconscious Psyche.

The presence of the star Astarte, a celestial figure who seems to offer guidance, further complicates the struggle of the ego. The speaker describes her as a symbol that initially appears benevolent:

" It was hard by the dim lake of Auber
/ In the misty mid region of Weir—
/ It was down by the dank tarn of Auber,
/ In the ghoulish-woodland of Weir" (Poe, lines 6-9).

The doubting of images creates a tension between guidance and the trap. Astarte might represent hope or illumination, but she also lures the speaker toward the tomb, where his repressed grief awaits. In Jungian terms, the ego is confronted here with material from the unconscious memories and emotions deeply connected with Ulalume that it has kept repressed. The confrontation acknowledges the conscious control of the speaker, exposing the fragility of his identity.

The ending of the poem is when the speaker finally realizes where he has arrived, and the revelation is devastating:

" And I cried– It was surely October
/ On this very night of last year
/ That I journeyed, I journeyed down here –
/ That I brought a dread burden down here–" (Poe, lines 83-86).

This recognition that he has unconsciously retraced his steps to the tomb highlights the inability of the ego to master its own psychic landscape. His conscious mind has forgotten and refuses to remember that this was the night of the burial of Ulalume. But his unconscious mind traces down the memory lane and compels the journey, showing how the ego often lags in awareness, caught between repression and recognition. Wikipedia's summary of Jung's model explains that the ego is " the conscious mind, encompassing thoughts, memories, and feelings we are aware of, but not the totality of the psyche" ("Ego, Jungian Psychology"). In this poem, the partial warmth is dramatized as the haunting repetition.

This dynamic is also echoed in the structure of the poem. Of the circular return of the ego to trauma, it's cyclical rhythms, where there are place names such as the ghoulish woodland of Weir, that repeat. The speaker does not move forward, but only repeats the images and the location, which represent his failure to rise above grief. The 'ego' can be seen as a thin layer that is constantly fractured by the unconscious memory. The most obvious is that the ego is weak when encountering unresolved trauma. Instead of remembering the experience of Ulalume's death in his conscious self, the speaker has allowed repression to dominate him. However, the repression does not extend to the grief which is just as much a reality as it is a suppressed sensation, and which, in the end, cannot be eliminated by repression but only repeated compulsively second time around. The ego is mystified and unable to make sense of the experience. When the ego is taken over by that which is not conscious, the person is in danger of psychic disorientation, Jung said. The speaker of Poe's poem is a representative of this state, a haunted landscape; Poe's speaker is an example of the balance of the ego between order and collapse. So, Ulalume is more than just a remark on melancholy. A poetic journey of the Jungian ego in meeting with the memory of the unconscious. October's barren landscape represents the fragility of consciousness, and the path to the tomb mirrors the struggles of the ego with repressed grief. The poem shows that whatever is in the center of consciousness – the ego – is still vulnerable to the more powerful and deep forces of the people. The ego is the conscious centre of an individual, the self that the individual is most aware of, usually associated with identity, to Jung. The individual shares their past experiences and identities, and arrives at the conclusion that the individual will trust themselves and decide what they will become in their own future.

Conclusion:

Applying Carl Jung's analytical psychology to the works of Edgar Allan Poe, one can see the rich layers of experience that human beings can contain and the way in which archetypes engage in drama within the human psyche. The three poems analyzed here, "The Raven", "Annabel Lee", and "Ulalume", provide unique, but interrelated, images of the Jungian shadow, persona, and ego. In addition to proffering a way

to voice Poe's peculiar fascination with grief and love and mortality, each poem also offers an insight into the universal psychological reality of how people internalize their pain.

The shadow is seen as a representation of unspoken grief and despair in the poem "The Raven" (1845). The raven serves as a symbol for the darkness of the unconscious, which invades the speaker's efforts to be logical and to be at peace. The shadow, Jung saw, represented the "unknown dark side" of the personality and is usually suppressed by the conscious self because it is in opposition to the conscious self's ideals and values. The phrase "Nevermore" is repeated throughout the poem, reflecting the haunting nature of the shadow; it will not go away, but keeps coming back, so that it can be acknowledged. The speaker in Poe, however, refuses to be integrated into the world, instead he is eaten up by the darkness he fears. Thus, "The Raven" portrays the negative effects of ignoring the shadow: destabilization of the psyche and the subsumption of the self by the shadow. In contrast, "Annabel Lee" (1849) represents Jung's idea of the persona, the social mask which stands between the individual and the outside world. Poe's speaker builds himself up as the epitome of the eternal lover, claiming a relationship "stronger than love" which is "stronger than death. But this clinging to the character is a sign of the risks to over-identifying with the character. Annabel Lee is not remembered as a human being but as a symbol to maintain the speaker's role. The speaker has an image of love and devotion idealized, protecting his pain. However, Jung warned that identification with the persona can lead to stagnation, when the person's sense of identity becomes a self-created persona. In this way, "Annabel Lee" shows how the persona can protect and she can be trapped; how the persona can be socially recognized and give narrative coherence but at the same time how more significant truths of the psyche are obscured. Last but not least, "Ulalume" (1847) depicts the weak and troubled psyche, known as the ego, the center of the conscious mind. The speaker, who strolls through a desolate October setting, transforms into a persona of the ego in a moment of conflict between recollection and repression. Reading the way to Ulalume's tomb through the unconscious forces that he barely understands dramatizes the vulnerability of the ego, when faced with return of repressed trauma. The celestial guide Astarte represents the ambivalent attraction of the unconscious and seems to guide towards hope, but yet towards grief. The repetition of the poem's pattern creates the cyclical effect of the ego's entrapment in mourning without being able to move beyond it or to become a part of it. Poe's character embodies the idea that the ego is the "hero" of one's personality, not independent, but always subject to unconscious forces that are partly beyond one's control, as propounded by Jung.

Throughout these three poems, Poe's poetic speakers tend to anticipate the observation that ego function involves a triangulation of the ego's attempts to negotiate between conscious identity and the unconscious on the other hand, the persona and its attempts to shield ego from grief yet play a socially acceptable role and the shadow. Ego falters, persona and shadow intrude. Whether or not intentionally, Poe here dramatizes, in 1840, four of the most important Jungian insights. Jung argued that individuation is not about becoming perfect but rather whole. It is the process of accepting and integrating all parts of ourselves. Poe's characters balk at the process and the tragedy of their lives is that they cannot achieve a psychic balance. When the speaker in "The Raven" refuses to acknowledge the shadow, he cannot keep from disintegrating. If in "Annabel Lee" over-identification with the person traps the speaker in a rigid role or persona, in "Ulalume" the ego is too fragile to integrate, leaving the speaker locked repetitively in a cycle of grief. Poe's characters, however, resist this process, and their tragedy lies in their inability to achieve psychological balance.

In the end the use of Jung's archetypes for Poe's poetry not only brings out the richness of Poe's work, but the universal horoscope of Poe's themes. The people who speak to him, the ones who mourn or forget or lose, all experience the same struggle of the conscious and unconscious, the individual and the mask, the self and the shadow, the universal and the particular, the living and the dead, the mortal and the immortal

which has characterized humans throughout all time. Poe created images and musical verses that evoke in the reader not only the sense of a literary achievement but of a psychological case study in these works, for they made such haunting pictorial statements of the conflicts they represent. His poetry continues to be so arresting because it dramatizes the conflicts intrinsic to human identity, and those that were brought into being by Jung and his work. Therefore, a Jungian interpretation of Poe would reveal a poet whose reevocations of the psyche are sensitive. Poe did not state the theories which Jung was to develop in the future, but his art and poetry are a manifestation of the same psychological truths. The shadow, persona, and ego are not only ideas in *The Raven*, *Annabel Lee* and *Ulalume*, they are experiences of a despair, devotion, and disorientation. The poetry of Poe records these forces, some felt and some acted and some wielded against the self in the struggle to contain it, in order to register the indelible fact that the human mind is not a single, unified force but a field of forces: some felt, some were performed, some were struggled.

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