



## Conformity and Crisis: Analyzing the Digital and Gendered Personae through Jung's Archetypes

Amina Razaq  <sup>1</sup>

### ABSTRACT

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Historically, human psyche has been a subject of literary inquiry but the challenges of postmodern age require a renewal examination through which identity is constructed and maintained in society. This article applies Carl Jung's Analytical Psychology to analyze the critical tension between the Persona (the social mask) and the Shadow (the repressed self) in the works of postmodern poets, Sherman Alexie and Warsan Shire. The study focuses on how cultural pressure shapes individual identity and hinders the process of individuation. Examining Alexie's selected poems, the analysis identifies the digital Persona as a mechanism for chronic psychological stagnation and avoidance, while studying selected poems of Warsan Shire reveals psychological burden caused by imposed gendered Persona. The comparison establishes a structural dichotomy in the modern identity crisis; the passive failure of Ego and the triumph of Self through integration. Both poets conform that psychological wholeness in the twenty-first century is possible, but only through an integration of the adopted social role and the repressed self of an individual.

**Keywords:** *Persona, Shadow, Individuation, Carl Jung, Warsan Shire, Sherman Alexie*

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer at Government Graduate College for Women, Khurrianwala (affiliated with GCUF).  
Email: [Aminaabdulrazaq266@gmail.com](mailto:Aminaabdulrazaq266@gmail.com)



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### **Postmodern Rifts: Mapping the Persona-Shadow Tensions**

The life of an individual in the postmodern age is a microcosm for looking at the society, at large. The age is riven with many problems as there is restlessness and chaos in the society. As postmodern individuals, people are living in an age where image is more important than the reality. To gain a high status in the society and to gain appraisal, they perform the tasks they would not have done in person; they make choices that meet the standards of the society, while they do not gratify their own selves, in reality. They seem to be currently at war with the parts of themselves that they do not want to look at. There is a war between real self and projected image of an individual. This tussle is fueled by changing social expectations and technological development. It allows the critics to inquire the nature of identity built by individuals.

The tension between the real and the projected image is impaired by digital culture and the globalized pressure to curate a seamless, acceptable identity. Carl Jung's proposed framework may be used to understand the conflicts of society with the individuals; his core concepts in this framework are "Persona" and "Shadow" (Jung, 1966, pg. 208). While Persona (the curated, socially adapted self) is needed for social interaction; it becomes problematic when an individual represses the Shadow (repressed reality) to an intolerable degree.

Sherman Alexie is a prominent voice in contemporary Indigenous Native American literature that blends realism with dark humor. His contemporaries also use language to confront colonialism, discuss generational stories of indigenous families to celebrate their culture. Alexie's poetry explores this phenomenon through the lens of a community caught between ancestral heritage and the allure of modern technology. His work suggests that the digital Persona, particularly in social media contexts, often serves as a site of psychological entrapment, preventing the necessary confrontation with historical and Personal trauma.

Warsan Shire, an esteemed British poet of Somali descent, has direct connections with displaced populations. She serves as a contemporary witness to the complexities of identity negotiation within a predominantly white society. Her poetry gives voice to the marginalized experiences of the diaspora and the female subject, where the Persona is not adopted happily, but it is a kind of survival strategy imposed by patriarchal and colonial structures. Shire's protagonists display the rare and unacceptable qualities of selfhood: strength and rage, considered abominable by a society.

This article posits that the works of Alexie and Shire function as a form of psychological documentation, mapping the journey from fragmentation toward potential integration. From Alexie's exploration of the digital and colonial Persona to Shire's focus on the gendered and displaced self, we witness a universal struggle for individuation (integration of conscious and unconscious parts of psyche) in a world that thrives on superficiality. This comparative analysis shows how the ego

(rational part of personality) uses external tools (Facebook for Alexie, the mirror for Shire) to avoid the painful work of individuation because it would be difficult for the conscious being to embrace his hidden identity in front of others. This analysis is not a simple thematic reading, but it goes ahead to celebrate the foregrounding of repressed parts of the psyche in the poems of these two poets. As in any given society, the focus is merely on the appearance and pretensions, no one dares to delve deeper and acknowledge the hidden pain, trauma and untold sufferings of a person. So, this courageous act, of bringing the repressed self into the light of consciousness, highlights the engulfing gap between the mirror and the mask, the pretension and the reality. In the postmodern landscape, if a person wants to live his life fully then he has to recognize his Shadow and embrace it fully.

Contemporary poets diagnose this rift between image and psyche and unveil the emotional cost involved to maintain the socially acceptable image of self. Sherman Alexie's "Facebook Sonnet" (2011), "Victory" (2015) and "Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World" (2009) and Warsan Shire's "For women who are difficult to love" (2012), "Were you being good to yourself" (2014) and "What We Own" (2011) offer distinct yet complementary critiques of the pressures exerted upon the individual Ego in the postmodern age: Alexie (2011) focuses on the digital sphere of performance, while Shire (2012) focuses on restrictive relational mandates.

Many psychologists of modern and postmodern era present theories about complexities of human psyche. These theories explain the reasons behind particular emotional states and highlight the factors which lead to particular behavioral patterns. Among these theorists, Carl Jung's Analytical Psychology is an apt framework to decode the inherent psychological tensions embedded within these texts. Jung's work is highly influential across the humanities, anthropology, and literature. As narrated by Colonia-Willner (2024), Jung's analysis of literature throws light on the symbolic meaning of a work and encourages the continuation of human growth by making individuals acquainted with unconscious levels of their day-to-day experiences. Jung recognizes the power of the arts and metaphor to explore "archetypal dimensions of the psyche" (2024, pp. 48, 57). This research highlights how the digital world demands individuals to maintain a socially acceptable public identity. In this process of identity construction, the Ego is always stressed, just to oblige the parameters of acceptability. This stress makes a person repress his unaccommodating characteristics, resulting not only in a flexible mask, but a psychological cage also. This restraint makes the hidden aspects of the self, appear openly, which leads to the psychological fragmentation and necessitates a deeper investigation into how Alexie and Shire utilize poetic imagery to expose the mechanisms of repression.

The main idea of this paper pivots around an understanding of how Alexie's poetry criticizes the creation of digital Persona inhibiting psychological growth, and leading to the collective suppression and subsequent destructive projection of the Shadow of loneliness and stagnation. While, Warsan Shire's poetry advocates for a

painful but necessary path toward the conscious integration of the authentic, often-denigrated Shadow of female independence and power, thereby challenging restrictive relational Persona. Both poets showcase individual instances of success or failure to achieve a Jungian individuation.

### **The Dialectics of Self: Scholarly Perspectives on Persona and Shadow**

Since literature is the reflection of life, all the problems of a given society are truly depicted in the literature of that particular era. In a postmodern society, the chaos and disruption is seen not only in the society but is also portrayed in its literature. Since the society is replete with many sorts of problems, the focus of critics, theorists, and psychologists has been the problems of the human beings carrying two personalities: one in the society and the other in the private.

Researchers have great concerns about this co-occurrence of Persona and Shadow in the individuals and they also notice that the current digital environment is a suitable platform for the individuals to selectively represent their personalities which hinders their psychological growth and pushes the contents of Shadow into the “unconsciousness” (Vibhute et al., 2025, p. 1503). By the application of this lens on the contemporary poetry, the archetypal conflicts in the contemporary literary representations may be studied.

Carl Jung’s concepts of Persona and Shadow were used by Muchammad Irsyadulumam (2021) to analyze Andy Weir’s *The Martian* (2014), and Suzanne Collins’ *The Hunger Games* (2008). He analyzes how the characters survive in the adverse conditions and respond to the situation at-hand. His research compares the outward, projected images, the apparent personalities, and the hidden darker sides of personality, that emerge in the challenging conditions. This study helps the general public know the inescapable influence of the archetypes on their character portrayal. The characters display their real image (Shadow) in their comfort zone where they do not need to look for the approvals from society and adopt the Persona (mask) in a social gathering where they give importance to the standards set by society.

This archetypal theory of Carl Jung serves as the framework for Pandiangan’s (2019) examination of the dual nature of the main character in Oscar Wilde’s *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890). The research focuses primarily on the archetypes of the Shadow and the Persona to analyze the “dark side” (the hidden personality, the repressed self), and the social “mask” (adopted or projected personality) of Dorian Gray (2019, p. 12). Pandiangan (2019) finds that the dominant trait of Dorian Gray’s Persona was his extraordinary handsomeness, wealth, and “passionate purity” (p. 15). This external mask serves as a form of “imaging” that allows him to appear favorable and gain the immediate trust of society, including his friends and his lover, Sybil Vane. Pandiangan concludes that Dorian Gray represents a radical struggle between public identity (Persona) and uncivilized desires (Shadow).

The psychological evolution of the protagonist of the *Death Note* series (2006-2007) is analyzed through the lens of Jungian archetypes in Marasigan's (2023) work. The researcher analyzes the function of Light as an antihero and explores the tension between public Persona and dark Shadow identity. The story reveals that the moral corruption prevents Light from achieving heroic resolution. The researcher concludes that the realistic flaws of Light make him a figure who exists between villainy and justice and argues that Light's Shadow eventually consumes his Persona, transforming his quest for justice into a "villainous thirst" for godlike power and control (Marasigan, 2023, p. 10). Marasigan states that the life story of Light Yagami is a tragic cautionary tale, which illustrates how the unrestrained adoration and pursuit of absolute moral authority, lead to the complete disintegration of the self.

By applying Jungian archetypal concepts, Kurniawati (2015) explores the psychological complexity of characters in Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886). Both heroes use their Personas to hide their inner desires and true selves: Gray adopts the Shadow of beauty and eternal youth, while Jekyll enjoys his social status as a respected scientist. Their Shadows are manifested physically as well as psychologically. Dorian's Shadow is revealed through his corrupting portrait, while Jekyll's Shadow is portrayed as a separate entity, Mr. Hyde. The research concludes that the characters fail because they fail to integrate the Persona and Shadow as Dr. Jekyll "chose to end his life by committing suicide" (Kurniawati, 2015, p. 53). It also reveals that if a person refuses to reconcile his Shadow with his public Persona, it leads not to liberation, but inescapably to self-destruction.

Jung's archetypes have also been employed by Raharto & Permatasari (2019) to identify Erik's adopting two "masks" to maintain his existence: One mask is named "The mask of phantom" (2019, p. 74), while the other mask is not really named but it is a black silk mask (black domino). The former is adopted to intimidate the managers and staff of the opera house. This helps him establish a mysterious and feared identity to protect his territory, while the latter is used for hiding his real face. As the true self of Erik is weak and could not have the same impact as his adopted-self had on others, he adopts this Persona to hide his physical deformity while fulfilling his desire for human connection. Another mask that he adopts is the mask of "The angel of music" (Raharto & Permatasari, 2019, p. 68). It is a sweet Persona created specifically and used intentionally by Eric to win the love of Christine Daaé.

The enactment of archetypal concepts of Persona and Shadow in Adrian Matejka's "The Big Smoke and Black American Persona Poetry" (2013) has been analyzed by Sharp (2019), who explores how black poets utilize poetry as a tool to challenge and rewrite historical narratives within the "Archive" (p. 376). Sharp examines the portrayal of Jack Johnson, the first Black world heavyweight boxing champion. The article describes "Shadow" as a manifestation of Johnson's repressed

inner voice, the hidden contents of his personality. The article concludes, that by using Persona to explore the “unforgivable blackness” of figures like Johnson, poets can bolster a “counter-archive” (Sharp, 2019, p. 376). This work is revolutionary because it insists on the humanity and person-hood of Black subjects, declaring that their stories remain contemporary and relevant to modern movements like *Black Lives Matter*. Not strictly in the context of archetypal concepts of Persona and Shadow, but the Native American identity and its implications have also been discussed by Aamir & Younus (2018, 2021), who conclude that when the authentic identity is suppressed by external force, it resurfaces as self-destruction.

All these studies highlight the ways in which different character portrayals have been sketched out to highlight the problems of postmodern man where a person has to wear a socially acceptable mask and he is expected to hide his true repressed self (Shadow) which gets represented in the form of aggression or retaliation and rebellion. Though the findings of the above papers are helpful, this research aims to add to the existing knowledge by studying two contemporary poets: Sherman Alexie and Warsan Shire.

This research paper seeks to analyze the Persona of digital performance and the collective Shadow of alienation in Sherman Alexie’s “Facebook Sonnet” (2011), “Victory” (2015) and “Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World” (2009). It also investigates how Warsan Shire’s poetry dismantles the imposed relational Persona and models Shadow integration through self-acceptance in her poems, “For women who are difficult to love” (2012), “Were you being good to yourself” (2014) and “What We Own” (2011). Subsequently, the paper offers to compare the resulting archetypal conflicts in both poets, thereby synthesizing the modern obstacles and requirements for achieving psychological wholeness.

Consequently, this research seeks to answer how Sherman Alexie’s poetry critiques the digital Persona’s role in fostering psychological stagnation and projecting a collective Shadow of alienation. It also analyzes how Warsan Shire’s poetry utilizes the rejection of the restrictive relational Persona to model the necessary reclamation and integration of the authentic Shadow Self. The contrasting archetypal outcomes as presented by Alexie (decay) and Shire (integration), the revelation about current challenges and paths are presented, along with what they reveal about the current challenges and paths toward Jungian individuation.

### **Jungian Frameworks as Epistemic Tools for Identity Construction**

The Persona, an actor’s mask, is taken as the outward face presented to the world. It is the social role adopted to meet cultural demands and gain acceptance. Jung (1976) describes this Persona as an archetype to conform to the ways of society. Contemporary studies reveal that while the Persona is important for social functioning, excessive rigidity may lead to conceal the “real self” (Perry, 2025, p. 3). Researchers use this concept to analyze social media platforms, which are the

“expression of shared symbols and memes” (Vibhute et al., 2025, p. 1507). Goffman (1959) expresses the need for Persona adoption in the following words: “At the moment the individual makes an appearance before others, his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society” (p. 35). Goffman’s words, spoken in 1959 still hold true because there is a constant need for performance, which results in the Ego becoming externally oriented and it weakens its connection to the internal Self of a human being.

The Shadow is defined as the hidden, inferior, and repressed “unconscious” contents of a person which reveal his primal instinct (Jung, 1966, p. 237). The individual Shadow is formed by actively repressing traits the “ego-consciousness” considers unacceptable or problematic (Serebrennikova, 2024). The Shadow contains the traits as “talent or aggression” which are essential for adult integrity (Serebrennikova, 2024). It contains traits that are deemed “hidden, repressed, for the most part inferior and guilt laden personality whose ultimate ramifications reach back into the realm of our animal ancestors” (Perry, 2025, p. 3). When these traits are repressed, these contents of Shadow can be projected onto others, often shown as toxicity and antagonism in interaction with other individuals. Analytical psychology postulates that literary and artistic characters are frequently just like reflective surfaces, which enable individuals to derive insights into their own Shadow contents. Another significant concept in this context is the self-archetype, which signifies the integration of the conscious and unconscious components of the human psyche. The elements relevant to this analysis are summarized below in a tabular form:

**Table 3.1 Key Jungian Archetypes for Literary Analysis**

<b>Archetype</b>	<b>Jungian concept</b>	<b>Reflection in Contemporary poetics</b>
<b>Persona (mask)</b>	The social role adopted for acceptance	Digital profiles (Alexie, 2011) and restrictive gender roles (Shire, 2012)
<b>Shadow</b>	Repressed and inferior parts of the personality	Loneliness and digital addiction (Alexie, 2011); independence and emotional excitability (Shire, 2012)

<b>Individuation</b>	The process to achieve wholeness by integration of conscious and unconscious material	Failed individuation (Alexie); painful path to individuation (Shire)
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**The Persona performance Trap, Shadow Integration, and Relational Autonomy in Sherman Alexie and Warsan Shire’s Poetry**

The constant grinding pressure of the postmodern society makes an individual suffer from the longing to have a Persona which is up to the societal expectations; thus, leading him to repress his true self and projecting his adopted Persona where his social image is more important to him than his real self. This study analyzes how the contemporary poets diagnose the issue of Persona and Shadow and offer the contrasting pathways to self-sovereignty in ever-demanding world.

In “Facebook Sonnet” Alexie satirizes the fragmented nature of digital identity. The speaker immediately welcomes the reader to “the endless high-school / Reunion” (Alexie, 2011), thus the theme of chronological stagnation and repression of true self of an individual is established. The Persona depends on adherence to an idealized, youthful past, insisting, “Why can't we pretend / Every stage of life is the same? / Let's exhume, resume, and extend / Childhood” (Alexie, 2011). By developing a presentable Persona in the digital world, the individual loses his capacity to grow and perform genuinely. This abandonment of the true self and projection of the fake personality leaves an individual lost in a hollow cycle where, in order to maintain his social standing, he has to play these performative roles throughout his life. From a Jungian perspective, this digital Persona impedes the individuation process as it makes a person forget his true self and project his socially acceptable image in the society. Psychological maturation requires a person to move forward in life, yet the digital platform demands regression and the repression of adult growth and reality.

The constant vigilance for the maintenance of Persona is a defense mechanism against the internal discomfort of a person who finds himself always struggling to conform to the tendencies and the addictive time consumption in the digital world. The individual’s continuous struggle for social acceptance is a way to turn away from reality. This evasion results in the dissociation of an individual from his real self. It prevents him from entering a space where he may encounter his hidden self, the contents of his Shadow.

The digital Persona is characterized by a preoccupation with external display and the display of traditionally private matters. Alexie (2011) observes, “Let fame / And shame intertwine. Let one’s search / For God become public domain. / Let church.com become our church” (Alexie, 2011). The collision of fame (public validation) and shame (vulnerability) gives way to a stage where psychological

complexity is made a public spectacle rather than a person's private suffering. This phenomenon reflects the changing trends of the digital world where one is unable to segregate the sacred from the profane, and the private from the public.

Generally, digital media platforms are considered appropriate ones where human beings find themselves comfortable to give vent to their repressed emotions, insecurities, and untold stories and experiences. Thus, they play their part in the development of a cleavage in society and add to the online toxicity as well. As these interactions unfold, "fragmentation and polarization in online spaces may also distort collective psyche dynamics" (Vibhute et al., 2025, p. 1506). In this digital environment, the unacknowledged contents of the Shadow are projected onto others. Resultantly, it becomes a kind of digital Shadowing that fosters further societal antagonism and judgment.

The message is loud and clear in the concluding couplet: "Let's sign up, sign in, and confess. / Here at the altar of loneliness" (Alexie, 2011). The repetition of this idea throughout the poem underscores the compulsive nature of digital addiction. Alexie (2011) posits that the collective embrace of a hyper-connected, performing Persona paradoxically results in the collective Shadow of loneliness.

In the poem, "Victory" by Alexie (2015), for the twelve-year-old narrator, the shoes represent the "ideal" version of himself. He is poor, but the shoes are "white and leather and high-top" (Alexie, 2015, p. 16). They allow him to present a mask of wealth, status, and athletic dominance. The Persona only functions when there is an audience. He dares to wear them to school because that is where his social identity is constructed. When the Persona is successful, the ego feels a sense of inflation. He feels "fast" and "could jump" because the mask is working—people see the shoes, and therefore they see a "winner" rather than a "thief" or a "poor kid" (Alexie, 2015, p. 16). The shoes function as a defensive mechanism which protects the narrator's self from stigma of poverty and secure his internal sense of worth as well.

The act of theft is a Shadow impulse. It is driven by a primitive need that the boy's conscious "good kid" self cannot fulfill legally (Alexie, 2015, p. 16). In Jungian terms, the Shadow is often repressed or pushed into the subconscious. By hiding the shoes under the bed for three weeks, he is literally keeping his Shadow hidden from the light of his family's "ego" (the household) (Alexie, 2015, p. 16). When the boy tells his father he found the shoes in the trash, he is trying to distance his Persona from his Shadow. He wants the benefit of the shoes without the stigma of the crime.

In "Grief calls us to the things of this world", Alexie (2009) gives expression to the unconscious part of human psyche. The title of this poem directly alludes to Richard Wilbur's famous poem 'Love Calls Us to the Things of This World' (1956) in which he blended the morning laundry with a spiritual vision. This poem is basically about the realization of the reality of life; where forgetfulness serves as a

healer to relieve humans of the pain of losing their near ones or some mishap or injury. It illustrates the divide between Persona, which the character in the poem adopts, to keep himself busy in his routine life, and Shadow, which he unconsciously confronts and feel that the scars in his soul are still fresh. The setting of a “five-star hotel” is a metaphor for the rigid, high-functioning Persona that he adopts to live up to the pomposity of the world, while the “blue telephone” acts as a catalyst that makes him remember his father. His father was obsessed with phones, thus, unaware of the impulsivity of the process, his conscious mind is forced to confront the unconscious. The speaker denies his father’s death for a year and his mother also does so by making coffee for her husband, completely forgetting about his death. This denial shows that they try to forget the loss as if it had not happened and do their best to maintain their Persona in society. However, in Alexie’s poem “Grief Calls Us to the Things of This World” (2009), the emergence of the “angels” is a violent personification of the unconscious. It shows that repressed emotions intrude upon the polished, grief-free facade and make it unsustainable. This intrusion and the final demolition of the Persona reveal the basic weakness of human psyche when it fights the world but fails to handle the pricks of unconscious mind.

Warsan Shire’s poetry functions as an inquiry into feminine experience and navigates the intersection of displacement and reclamation of identity. In her poem “For women who are difficult to love”, Shire (2012) critiques the deeply intimate relational space. This critique focuses on the psychological burden caused by imposed gendered Persona and the liberation after self-forgiveness. In this poem, Shire criticizes the gender roles, and as critics argue, this restricts women to the socially acceptable roles only, and give them a fixed feminine identity. The Persona required by the spouse is an “idealized standard,” demanding the woman to “curb her passions and take up as little space as possible to seem less demanding” (Shire, 2012). Perry (2025) claims that if parents or social standards label something as “unacceptable”, it is “suppressed and repressed and becomes part of our Shadow.” The speaker in the poem reclaims those hidden parts of her psyche and accepts the unacceptable as her real self and adores it as it really is. This embrace of unconscious mind transforms her Shadow from a site of shame into a source of power.

The Persona compliance puts explicit demands on women: “you tried to change, didn’t you? / closed your mouth more / tried to be softer / prettier / less volatile, less awake” (Shire, 2012). This imposed Persona by the society is an attempt to enforce a passive ideal which reflects the psychological trauma of faking herself in order to satisfy man’s needs which “prevents true intimacy and conflict” (Perry, 2025). When the women ignore their own selves and try to live up to the expectations of the society, they lose their true self and become dummies whose Personas truly lack their native authenticity. The constant neglect of their own exuberance and the unwavering importance given to the adaptation of Persona, pose a threat to their real self and further push their authenticity into the Shadow.

In Shire's work, *The Shadow* is characterized by raw, untamed instinct that directly conflicts with the Persona. The poetess uses powerful metaphors to describe the true self of woman: "you are a horse running alone" and a "burning house" (Shire, 2012). The partner, the one benefiting from the Persona, thinks that the Shadow, the real self, is destructive, stating that the woman is "blinding him" (Shire, 2012). This Persona is getting increasingly suffocating and the demand for Shadow integration also follows this suffocation as it is revealed in the display of destructive and aggressive urges in the lines, "so what did you want to do love / split his head open?" (Shire, 2012). Shire's poem expresses this unacceptable content to a level of acceptability and shows that repressed aggression in Shadow will finally shatter the restrictive Persona. The climax of the poem is self-affirmation and the ousting of the acceptable standards of society. When she says, "you are terrifying / and strange and beautiful/ something not everyone knows how to love" (Shire, 2012), it dismantles the Persona and shows that the woman has reclaimed her true self by embracing the terrors that the societal expectations forced her to disown previously.

Shire highlights the way Shadow integrates with the Persona in the poem "and were you being good to yourself?" (2016). Structured as a "love letter to self" (Shire, 2016), this poem addresses the internal critic of Ego and reveals how the retributive projection of the Shadow is turned inwards. The poem engages directly with self-criticism and unpretentious "girl, who tallied stretch marks into reasons why no one should get close" (Shire, 2016). The main act of the poem is forgiveness embodied when the speaker models self-acceptance for past failures and fears: "I forgive you, girl... I forgive you for being afraid... I forgive you, the diets and the cruel friends" (Shire, 2016). This explicit act of returning back of the self to its flawed and damaged history is the crucial step toward individuation. The integration confirms that psychological wholeness is possible only through acknowledgement of the rejected parts of the Self i.e. "self-acceptance and self-forgiveness" (Perry, 2025). Shire's poetry navigates to achieve a stable, sovereign identity by integrating the authentic content of Shadow. It confirms that self-sovereignty must be centered on the Self, not external validation.

In "What We Own," Shire (2011) explores societies where defective relations (marital relations) are very common and the women of those societies have to suffer due to the consistent absence of their spouses due to being in prison, or dead, or a departure to some remote place. The loss of women is expressed in the following words, "our men do not belong to us" (Shire, 2011, p. 9). It highlights the communal Persona of loss where the roles and lives of women are confined to "sit at kitchen, tables, counting on our fingers the ones who died" (Shire, 2011, p. 9). This collective Shadow of grief forces women not to rely on men. They "belong deeply to themselves" (Shire, 2011, p. 9), and have to seek strength within themselves.

These two contemporary poets, Alexie and Shire, though address distinct domains of modern life, they offer crucial parallels in their diagnosis of Persona

pathology (disordered self-image) and Shadow necessity (the need to confront the hidden). Their works highlight the challenges an individual faces to achieve individuation. In Alexie's work (2011), the Persona is a self-imposed mask of performative connection and perpetual youth. This restriction makes a person psychologically stagnant and he loses genuine social interaction.

In Shire's work, Persona is a gendered mask that is imposed culturally. It fosters patriarchal restriction by telling "conscious and unconscious messages about what is acceptable", and unequal power dynamics (Perry, 2025). The compulsion to conform to Persona is retributive, where the failure to conform to the mask of "softer, prettier" femininity and the inability to meet social standards leads to relational judgment and rejection (Shire, 2012). While Alexie criticizes the notion of Persona chosen for perceived connection, and Shire critiques one mandatory for acceptance; it is argued that both kinds of Persona ultimately cause the individual to suffer psychologically and inhibit the individuation necessary for psychological maturation.

In Alexie's "Facebook Sonnet (2011)" the Shadow is portrayed as largely unconscious, where the Persona is dedicated to the external world, "not the individual itself" (Giles, 2020, p. 16). The individual's suppressed need for authentic connection is a reflection of a collective Shadow of loneliness and is projected outward as toxicity. Alexie (2011) gives expression to the passive psychological decay of the Ego in his writing, which is consumed by the fantasy world of the digital Persona. In Shire's poetry, relational and internal conflict forces the Shadow into consciousness. It is shown as powerful, volatile instinct and is subsequently reclaimed and forgiven (Shire, 2012, 2014). Shire deems the integration of repressed material necessary for "greater integrity and self-realization", as it results in the fortification of the ego of the individual as well (Serebrennikova, 2024). Alexie's work highlights the bare existence of a fragmented self, while Shire's poetry demonstrates that authentic healing depends not on the maintenance of a Persona, but on the courageous integration of the suppressed contents of the unconscious mind.

The core conflict that Alexie and Shire present in their poetry is the contemporary mechanism of repression. Alexie asserts that Shadow is projected through constant digital performance. This projection hinders the individual from confronting his internal discomfort. Shire, conversely, focuses on the internal repression of authentic traits such as volatility and independence. This repression defies the restrictive social Persona and reveals that the modern Persona has been weaponized: either by making its performance continuous and addictive as we see in Alexie (2011), or by making the failure of its performance punishable, as apparent in Shire (2012). Alexie warns that the Persona inflation makes the Ego dissolve into the collective unconscious; Shire deems the Shadow integration necessary to achieve a sovereign self.

### **Beyond Fragmentation: The Reclamation of the Sovereign Self**

Sherman Alexie and Warsan Shire provide essential psychoanalytic insights into the pressures exerted by postmodern society on individual identity. The comparison brings out a structural dichotomy in contemporary identity. It seems a crisis of identity in the digital world where ego dissolution is caused by Persona inflation, while restrictive cultural norms in the society cause Ego repression due to Persona compliance. Both poets conform that true psychological wholeness is achieved through conflict and integration when the individual acknowledges and accepts the repressed self. These two contemporary poets diagnose the problems of modern psyche and offer the standpoint where the readers recognize their unconscious conflicts and suggest pathways to have psychological integrity.

Both poets demonstrate that fear of being considered an outcast, and our inherent obligation to societal values, restrains our Shadow which results in the internalized obedience to a colonial or patriarchal Persona. True self-realization comes only with the realization of the Shadow and turning it from a source of bad image to a source of strength and psychological development. In their poems, both poets define identity in different ways; Alexie focuses on the experiences of indigenous peoples (Native Americans) while Shire's main focus is on the bitter experiences of the refugees (Somalian refugees) and the suffering of women in exile. Together, they discuss the concept of impossible homes. Their poetry highlights that the concept of home (identity) is shattered in the postmodern world and one needs to rebuild it through language.

The synthesis of these perspectives reveals that the mechanisms of repression may vary from the high-tech performativity of social media to the high-stakes conformity of gendered expectations, but the psychological cost of this variation has always been a fragmented sense of Self. In the poetry of Alexie and Shire, language is treated as a site of synthesis where the Ego, Shadow, and Persona are negotiated. This offers a model for navigating in a world fragmented with colonial aftermath and cultural erasure.

This study provides a practical guide for application of Jungian psychology to understand the human self-image and the moral consequences of a "revolting" Shadow that is no longer controlled (Jung, 1966, p.50). The research implies that the digital Persona results into identity crisis in the postmodern age. Therefore, in this age, poetry becomes an interstitial space where individuals find solace to reclaim their identities. It also implies that the circumstances of a person's life shape him into an individual who wears the mask (Persona) to satisfy his urge of recognition but it is difficult for him to carry the burden of Persona. Therefore, the individual succumbs to his real self and the Shadow contents of his personality get revealed in one way or the other.

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