A1X: Can analyze a film noir text in terms of form, content, and/or sociohistorical context.

Reread John Sanford’s discussion of Jungian psychology in “The Shadow,” with particular attention to the Jungian concept of the shadow and its relation to the ego, the self and “the unlived life.” Then review the film Shadow of a Doubt in light of the reading by Sanford, paying particular attention to the behavior and attitudes of the main characters. What Jungian features or dynamics are represented in the characters? Also, consider the concept of the shadow as an interpretive tool in this context. Does it help you see anything noteworthy about the film that you might not have seen otherwise? Explain.

Sundown, You Better Take Care:

The Shadow Lurking 'Round Your Back Stairs

In Jungian psychology, the “shadow” is the sum of personality facets we subdue in a desire to embody our preferred presentation, the “ego ideal.” Alfred Hitchcock’s Shadow of a Doubt gives life to this ego-shadow divide with a literal split into two main characters: an admired young woman and her beloved yet mysterious uncle who share a subliminal connection. Having made unwanted discoveries about her uncle’s nefariousness, the woman must accept and utilize her own secret side to survive, both literally and in a Jungian sense by becoming a truly balanced self.

The shadow is harbor to the parts of our subconscious we don’t want to express. Some are darker traits that society actually considers abhorrent, and so the instinct to suppress them helps us conform (Sanford 49). However, the shadow is far from being
entirely negative. From the “whole spectrum of potential human behavior,” we select some things to portray as our conscious self, while the rest live on in the “secondary personality” of our shadow (50). It contains opposites to our public personalities: the reticent possesses an inner loudmouth, the circumspect a hidden daredevil. These unexpressed traits and potential other lives, if acknowledged and properly employed, are useful and can even protect us when facing someone controlled by a similar impulse of their own (52-3). Catching a thief may take a thief, but thinking like one can prevent the robbery.

In *Shadow of a Doubt*, it is Charlotte “Charlie” Newton’s failure to think like a murderer that endangers her, and the subsequent accessing of her inner criminal that saves her life. When Charlie fails to recognize her shadow, as embodied by murderous uncle Charles Oakley, she allows this danger to remain in her life. Both Charlie and her family are guilty of suppressing a “collective Shadow” (56): there walks a killer among them who talks casually of butchering “swine” and other useless beings, yet they refuse to acknowledge the signs. Perhaps he has been there all along, in the form of Charlie’s own shadow personality—only now emerged in Charles’ form.

From the film’s beginning, Charles and Charlie are seen as identical, striking the same bed-prone pose of malaise in their different locales (Hirsch 192). She is his namesake, of course, and upon his arrival they run to each other on the train platform. They run, that is, once Charles ditches the deceiving hunch-and-limp he was using as a disguise when disembarking. The relieved Charlie declares, “You’re not sick!” (Oh?)

Referring immediately to their lifelong connection, young Charlie tells Charles that they’re like twins, and that she knows him well. “You don’t tell people everything,”
Charlie teases. A suppressive instinct is something Charlie identifies for us as her common quality with Charles. In other words, both are their own walking shadows.

Even before Charles arrives, Charlie’s family hints at potential trouble in summoning her shadow-uncle. When she asks her mother where to telegraph Charles, Emma seems unsure about establishing this connection. “If you’ve forgotten,” Emma hesitates, “I’m not going to tell you.” Yet Charlie reflects for a moment, does remember his location, and prepares her telegram. In Jung-worthy synchronicity, Charles has already sent a telegram presaging his arrival. (“He heard me,” Charlie later glows.)

As Charles settles in, Charlie’s father Joe stops him from throwing his hat on the bed. Superstitious? “No, but I don’t believe in inviting trouble,” says Joe. No need: trouble has invited itself. Or was it there all along? The bed in question does belong to Charlie: her room is where Charles is being hosted because, as Joe tells him, “Charlie thought you’d be more comfortable here.” If that isn’t a suggestion that Charles is Charlie, it’s at least an invitation to become her.

And briefly, Charles reunites with Charlie’s ideal of him, the one he long ago began surrendering to shadow impulses. Through his Philadelphia boardinghouse window, the fugitive Charles spied two men on the corner who represented punishment. Now, outside his niece’s window in Santa Rosa, Uncle Charlie sees nothing but benevolence: two little old ladies having a sidewalk chat. Charles smiles. Does he intend to rejoin decent society, and be the best Uncle Charlie he can be?

He turns and throws his hat on the bed.

Charlie had summoned Charles to shake up her family—and “save” them—as tapping one’s shadow can do. Sanford calls family life “a crucible in which the shadow
problem can be met and worked upon” (57), and Charles does begin to work immediately on the problems Charlie sees in her family. The gifts Charles brings the family are for the opposite of the recipient’s ego: a fluffy toy for bookish Ann, a sporty watch for staid Joe, a fashionable stole for deprived Emma. In this way, Charles is there as their shadows as well, providing what they can’t or won’t let themselves enjoy.

Yet when Charles attempts to conceal his own shadow, covertly excising a newspaper article about his deeds, Charlie sees through this attempt to suppress a secret side. “You can’t hide from me,” she taunts. “We’re sort of like twins, don’t you see? We have to know.” Fighting his suppression, Charlie digs through her uncle’s jacket for the evidence to identify the source of her tension. She won’t be comfortable until she finds it, because searching for secrets in her “twin” means searching herself. These are Charlie’s first steps toward facing her shadow, something “essential for the development of self-awareness” (57).

Charlie’s search heightens with the arrival of those two detectives pursuing Charles, posing as survey takers. The men attempt to corner Charles in his room, though it is Charlie’s own door separating them from their target. When the door is opened and—as detective Jack Graham suspected—Charles is gone, it’s Charlie who is there to question. Charles does return, his ingenuous ingress not only deepening the shadow of doubt, but also showing Charlie the way to her shadow: the back stairs of the Newton house.

Mentioned early in the film, this back stairway is too challenging for Charlie’s mother Emma: “Those back stairs are steep,” she declares. Hearing about this stairway is how Detective Graham knows Charles won’t be in Charlie’s room, the men having
climbed the front stairs to find him. Seeing Charles use these back stairs for subterfuge gives Charlie an early inkling about her uncle, but also demonstrated how she might escape the confinement of her ego ideal. Charles has revealed the stairway’s purpose: access to one’s shadow. No wonder Emma finds them steep.

While touring the town alone with Detective Graham, his insinuations about her uncle now alarm Charlie—a discomfort that Sanford would call fear of recognizing our shadow: “we dread seeing our dark side for fear we will become it” (64). Revealing that he is a detective pursuing Charles, Jack encourages Charlie to see her uncle for what he is. In Jungian terms, Jack tries to help Charlie reconcile her idyllic ego with the shadow she senses in her uncle and, thus, herself. It is an act of psychological protectiveness by the detective, whose job teaches him well that “we are much more likely to be overcome by the Shadow if we do not recognize it” (64).

When Charlie parts with Jack, declaring her uncle’s innocence but clearly shaken by what she’s learned, it is the first time we see her choose to use those back stairs. Certainly she is avoiding Charles, who has been awaiting her just inside the front door. Yet she is also taking leave of her previous persona, avoiding the brightly lit front facade and entering the shadows leading to the back of the house.

There Charlie runs into Joe and his neighbor friend Herb, who seem to be strolling in the dark, chattering over their cherished pulp fiction and simulated murder plots against each other. “It’s your father’s way of relaxing,” Emma later explains, but it is more than that. Their constant jocularities about death and dismemberment show that they acknowledge the shadow, with a subtle vigilance for the presence of danger. (Much later, Herbie’s recognition of the shadow will help save Charlie’s life.) Joe and
Herbie certainly know about that back stairway, and seem momentarily surprised that Charlie is going to head there.

This first use of the rear stairs marks Charlie’s journey into her shadow self. The heretofore golden child is now a denizen of deceit. Charlie becomes a sneak to catch a sneak: rummaging through her own waste bin—like her shadow, a collection of her castoffs—to find the missing newspaper clip. In a secret late-night dash to the library, the model student now disobeys a crossing guard and hassles the outraged bookmarm into admitting her … minutes after closing, even!

Santa Rosa reveals its shadow during Charlie’s journey. Charles is now ensconced there as a favorite local figure, a collective shadow sustained by Charlie’s family. Unable to take this continued suppression, Charlie flees the house and Charles pursues her through nighttime Santa Rosa, now busier and threatening. The traffic cop who earlier scolded Charlie now seems reassured when seeing that Charles is in charge of her now—an official establishment sanction that the murderer may stay.

The culmination of Charlie’s self-education happens in the ‘Til-Two bar where Charles drags her, marking Charlie’s arrival in the mythical underworld. “I’ve never been in a place like this,” she says. Charlie’s acquaintance Louise, the catatonic barmaid who shuffles through her existence like the Tartarus dead, awakens only to covet Charles’ ill-gotten emerald ring that signifies his guilt. Louise has fallen here from higher station, and we sense that Charlie sees one of her own un-lived lives in this former classmate.

As Charlie has come to act more like the deceptive Charles, she begins to hate him more and more. This revulsion is a result of having unconsciously assigned to Charles her own dark impulses. When unwittingly giving others this side of ourselves to
carry, “we will then hate or fear them” (59). Here in the ’Til-Two, Charles tears down the division between them, between Charlie’s ego and shadow, with his education in the ways of the world, this “foul sty” that he demands she acknowledge. “Learn something,” the scornful uncle challenges her—just as he had earlier warned Emma while waving a (butter) knife, “You ought to have better sense.”

Charlie’s ultimate arrival in shadow happens when she assents to keep Charles’ secret and let him set his own timetable for leaving town. Abetting a known murderer to maintain a tranquil fiction for her fragile mother, Charlie has released her ego and become her shadow. Now that she has reached this side of herself, Charlie has enabled herself to free her family, her home and her town from this trouble. It takes someone with a killer inside to dispatch a killer.

Once young Charlie has effected the death of Uncle Charlie, who is given a state funeral by the grieving town of Santa Rosa, she finds commiserative solace with the only person who shares her new knowledge. Detective Graham knows Charlie’s secret, and has guided her to reconcile it with her public portrayal. Though he cameos as a train passenger, Alfred Hitchcock is really embodied in the detective, allowing us to see the shadow behind our ego, so we may resolve the two into a healthier Jungian Self.

Uncle Charlie’s ever-present cigar, however, is pure Freud.
Works Cited
