



Narcissism as a normalized psychological and cultural condition in Joseph Conrad's «*Heart of Darkness*»

الترجسية كحالة نفسية وثقافية طبيعية في "قلب الظلام" لجوزيف كونراد

Le narcissisme en tant que condition psychologique et culturelle normalisée dans «*Au cœur des ténèbres*» de Joseph Conrad

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ملخص

يقترح هذا المقال دراسة الترغسية كحالة نفسية وثقافية في عصر الإمبريالية في رواية قلب الظلام لجوزيف كونراد. يهدف هذا المقال بشكل أساسي لدراسة العلاقة بين الإمبريالية كسياسة أيديولوجية تهدف لزيادة السلطة والهيمنة والترغسية كحالة نفسية تتميز بالجشع والسيطرة والتلاعب. في هذا المقال نحاول إظهار كيف أن الظروف البيئية خلال فترة التوسع الإمبريالي مهدت الطريق لخلق بيئة نرجسية وساهمت في تشجيع توسع الإمبريالية وتبريرها. يتم عرض الترغسية في رواية قلب الظلام من خلال شخصية كورتز التي يبدو أنها تظهر سمات الشخصية النرجسية. لذلك، فإن هذا المقال يحاول شرح كيف أن أيديولوجية تفوق العرق الأوروبي الأبيض والانحدار الأخلاقي الذي ميز تلك الفترة بالإضافة إلى المفاهيم الفلسفية التي طورها فريدريك نيتشه والتي ركزت على رغبة الفرد في العظمة جعلت الغرب عرضة للجشع والسلطة والانحطاط، وبالتالي ساهمت في تغذية شعور كورتز بالعظمة وتحويله إلى إمبريالي نرجسي.

الكلمات الدالة: الإمبريالية؛ البيئة الثقافية؛ التلاعب؛ الانحدار الأخلاقي؛ الترغسية؛ جوزيف كونراد؛ قلب الظلام؛ نيتشه.

Abstract

The present article proposes to study narcissism as a normalized cultural and psychological condition in the Age of Imperialism in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*. More precisely, it attempts to study the relationship between imperialism as a policy of extending power through force and manipulation and narcissism as a

psychological condition characterized by greed, abuse and deceit. It essentially aims at showing how the environmental conditions at the period of intensified imperialistic expansion from the latter half of the nineteenth century until the outbreak of WWI paved the way for creating a narcissistic environment which both encouraged and justified imperialism. Narcissism in *Heart of Darkness* is essentially displayed by the character Kurtz. Therefore, this article tries to examine how the ideology of white supremacy, moral decline that characterized the period along with Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophical concepts which stressed the individual's instinctual desire for grandiosity left the West vulnerable to abusive power and eventually contributed to turning Kurtz into a narcissist imperialist.

Keywords: cultural environment; *Heart of Darkness*; imperialism; Joseph Conrad; manipulation; moral decline; narcissism; Nietzsche.

Résumé

Le présent article propose d'étudier le narcissisme en tant que condition psychologique et culturelle normalisée à l'ère de l'impérialisme dans le roman de Joseph Conrad, *Au Cœur des Ténèbres*. Plus précisément, il vise à étudier le lien entre l'impérialisme en tant que doctrine d'expansion et de domination, et le narcissisme en tant que condition psychologique caractérisée par l'avidité, l'abus et la manipulation. Il vise essentiellement à montrer comment les conditions environnementales au cours de la période d'expansion impérialiste ont contribué à la création d'un environnement narcissique qui a à la fois encouragé et justifié l'impérialisme. Dans le roman *Au Cœur des Ténèbres*, le narcissisme se manifeste essentiellement à travers le personnage de Kurtz. Par conséquent, cet article tente d'expliquer comment l'idéologie de la suprématie blanche, le déclin moral qui a marqué l'époque ainsi que les concepts philosophiques développés par Friedrich Nietzsche, qui mettaient l'accent sur le désir de grandeur, ont laissé l'Occident vulnérable à l'avidité de pouvoir et ont conduit Kurtz à devenir un impérialiste narcissique.

Mots-clés: *Au Cœur des Ténèbres*; Déclin Moral; environnement culturel; impérialisme; Joseph Conrad; manipulation; narcissisme; Nietzsche.

Introduction

Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* is one of the most widely analyzed works in English literature that occupies a unique place among the canonical texts. Although *Heart of Darkness* is based on Conrad's personal experience in the Congo region of West Africa, it is overly reductive to limit the novel to the writer's autobiography. Since its publication in 1902, *Heart of Darkness* has been a challenging work for critics given its equivocality. From a postcolonial perspective, "racism has been the principal charge leveled against *Heart of Darkness*." (Firchow, 2000, p.4) It has been assumed that Conrad



rarely provides the local natives with speech or any human traits. Feminist discourse has offered similar critiques. Various feminist critics claim that Conrad has flattened female characters similar to the way he has belittled the Africans: “Nina Pelikan Straus, Bette London, Johanna M. Smith, and Elaine Showalter were among those who claimed that *Heart of Darkness* was not only imperialist but also sexist.” (Bloom, 2009, p.86) By the 1940s and 1950s, at a time when literary criticism was dominated by a psychologically oriented approach, *Heart of Darkness*, accordingly, was examined in such a way as to highlight the complexities of the human psyche.

At that time, psychoanalysis became very popular and many literary works were interpreted along the Freudian lines. Also, after the Second World War, existentialism which lays emphasis on individual existence became a well-known and significant philosophical and cultural movement in Europe and the United States. For these reasons as well as others, *Heart of Darkness* has become a meeting ground for many literary critics who aim at examining the complex relationship between the Africans and the Europeans in the light of psychoanalysis. These studies aim at highlighting the importance of the psyche and examining how the personality development determines the individual’s behaviour and relationships with others.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the relationship between the European imperialists and the Congolese which is based on exploitation, dominance, and abuse could be the result of both psychological and cultural conditions. Along the lines of psychoanalysis, Kurtz could be regarded as a narcissist who is obsessed with his inflated image as a god of the Congo and who seeks authority with complete disregard for the natives whom he abuses and exploits. The way Conrad portrays Kurtz in *Heart of Darkness* best matches the psychoanalysts’ description of the narcissistic personality. The psychoanalyst Lowen (1985) explains that narcissism on the individual level is “a personality disturbance characterized by an exaggerated investment in one’s image at the expense of the self.” (p.IX) On the cultural level, Lowen observes that:

Narcissism can be seen in a loss of moral values...A society that sacrifices the natural environment for profit and power betrays its insensitivity to human needs...When wealth occupies a higher position than wisdom, when notoriety is admired more than dignity when success is more important than self-respect the culture itself overvalues image and must be regarded as narcissistic.



Therefore, according to Lowen, the cultural environment plays a crucial role in causing narcissistic personality disorder. In a society where ethical values have been substituted by personal greed, the individual is likely to grow up to be a narcissist. Considering both the individual and cultural levels of narcissism, it could be hypothesized that Kurtz's sense of grandiosity and abusive behaviour towards the natives are the result of the narcissistic environment to which Kurtz belongs. In order to prove this hypothesis, it is imperative to answer three main questions. The first is to know whether the cultural conditions at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century were in favour of creating a narcissistic environment that would have turned Kurtz into a narcissistic imperialist. The second is to verify whether Kurtz operates as an abusive narcissist in terms of how he treats the natives. The third is to examine the extent to which Kurtz's abuse, deceit, and barbarism are normalized and standardized in a narcissistic environment. In an attempt to answer the three questions, psychoanalytical theory on narcissism has been selected as the main theoretical framework. In addition to psychoanalysis, we will refer to some of Friedrich Nietzsche's most influential philosophical concepts introduced in the nineteenth century, mainly his concept of the "Will to Power". The latter is believed to be one of the main instinctual forces which lie deep in human beings and which underline the human desire for grandiosity. Therefore, using Nietzsche's concept of the Will to Power would further support the argument that the cultural environment in the Age of Imperialism turned Kurtz into a narcissistic imperialist by both triggering and normalizing his instinctual need to obtain power.

1. Kurtz's inflated sense of superiority as an expression of a narcissistic environment

It has been observed that excessive protection may result in a feeling of entitlement. The psychoanalyst Aniston (2022) notes that the narcissist "will now expect everyone to treat him or her as royalty," (p.22) simply because their environment has always treated them as such. In other words, the narcissist will develop a superiority complex. However, Aniston goes on to argue that a neglectful or indifferent environment may cause the narcissist to feel inferior to others. The narcissist will consequently grow into a person who believes that "people should act as strangers and do not care about the feelings of others." (p.23). In the same context, the psychoanalyst Adler (2013) addresses the contradiction of the superiority complex in relation to its opposite condition. He states that "where we see an inferiority complex, we

find a superiority complex more or less hidden [and] an individual should not strive to be superior and succeed if [he/she] did not feel a certain lack in [his/her] present condition.” (p.79)

Weighing both arguments, we can assume that people who develop a narcissistic personality disorder suffer from distortions in the perception of their value and the value of others. Whether narcissism results from an inferiority or a superiority complex, the narcissist’s environment fosters a sense of entitlement and egoism that allows the narcissists to break laws, abuse others, disregard rules in pursuit of their sense of supremacy and the position they believe they deserve. This would allow them to mask, at least temporarily, their feelings of inferiority, imperfection and hollowness.

In *Heart of Darkness*, multiple reasons might have led Kurtz to develop a sense of superiority. If we consider the environmental factors, we can argue that Kurtz’s inflated image of the self may stem from the ideology of white supremacy, one of the myths upon which the Western civilization is built. Bireda (2021) explains that the Western ideology “uses races to create difference...[and] provide for the collective and individual privilege and advantage of those designed and perceived as white.” (p.XV). Race as a form of prejudice is emphasized by Gates (1986) who states that “race is the ultimate trope of difference, because it is very arbitrary in its application.” (p.5) Gates wishes to underscore that race is a trope rather than an indication of a real difference. Kurtz best illustrates how the white supremacy manifests in the social, economic and cultural history of European expansion. Marlow reports that “all Europe contributed to the making of Kurtz” (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.71).

At this point in the analysis, we can thus deduce that the belief in white supremacy promoted by the West is essential to Kurtz’s well-being as it provides him with a sense of superiority and justifies his position in the Congo as a liberator of the uncivilized Africans, even if this would mean having recourse to violence and abuse. One example that best exposes Kurtz’s ideological rhetoric is his report of the International Society for the Suppression of Savage Customs: “He began with the argument that we white, from the point of development we had arrived at, must necessarily appear to them [savages] in the nature of supernatural beings –We approach them with the might of a deity.” He carries on: “By the simple exercise of our will we can exert a power for good practically unbounded.” Then, he ends his report: “Exterminate all the brutes.” (p.72) Kurtz’s words expose

him as a narcissist who views himself as a supernatural being by virtue of his race. Hence, white supremacy, which is presented as an unquestionable fact, serves to institutionalize and normalize Kurtz's authoritarian position in the Congo.

However, it is also worth considering the second argument which highlights indifference and neglect as other possible reasons behind Kurtz's supremacy. In addition to assertions about the dominance of white Europeans over people of African descent, the time at which the novel was written was characterized by greed, excessive materialism and loss of values. With Friedrich Nietzsche's proclamation that "God is dead" (1883/1999, p.3), modern man lives for the acquisition of earthly glory rather than for entrance into heaven. According to Nietzsche, nihilism has become a central trend in the modern age as a result of the decline of Western values, Christian beliefs in particular. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche (1886/2017) poses the idea that Nature is indifferent and lacks both pity and justice:

You desire to live according to nature? Oh, you noble stoics, what fraud of words! Imagine to yourselves a being like Nature, boundlessly extravagant, boundlessly indifferent, without purpose or consideration... Life itself is essentially appropriation, injury, conquest of the strange and weak, suppression, severity, obtrusion of peculiar forms, incorporation, and at the least putting it mildest exploitation (p.13).

Nietzsche adds that "exploitation does not belong to a depraved or imperfect and primitive society: it belongs to the *nature* of the living, being as a primary organic function; it is the consequence of the instinct Will to Power, which precisely the will to live." (p.120). Therefore, according to Nietzsche, man is motivated by the will to power, and the act of valuing oneself is an expression of it. Moreover, the will to power somehow justifies the division of people into the weak and strong, the exploiter and exploited, the civilized and uncivilized.

In the light of Nietzsche's philosophy, it could be said that Kurtz's main leading interest is the will to power which symbolizes the Western man's greed. From the moment Marlow reaches the Congo, he is aware of how important ivory has become in the Europeans' lives: "The word 'ivory' rang in the air, was whispered, was sighed. You would think they were praying to it." (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.33). Kurtz, who is the embodiment of the European imperialists' greed, can only value himself in terms of the power he can gain

and the possessions he can acquire. Marlow examines: “You should have heard him say, ‘My ivory.’ Oh yes, I heard him, ‘My Intended, my ivory, my station; my river.” (p.70). Kurtz’s accumulation of ivory makes him feel he is so in control that he claims the whole station as his own. It is also worth noting that Kurtz’s Intended, although he refers to her first, is mentioned among a list of objects belonging to Kurtz, a fact which indicates that she is for him more of a possession than a human being.

A further proof of this is her being referred to as Kurtz’s Intended. The fact that she remains unnamed shows that very little value is accorded to her as an autonomous being. Most importantly, it has never been reported that Kurtz has praised his Intended or expressed his love and admiration for her. In contrast, the closing scene in the novel exposes the Intended as a symbol of extreme devotion and unconditional love. When Marlow visits Kurtz’s Intended one year after Kurtz’s death, he is surprised to find that the woman is still dressed in black: “She seemed as though she would remember and mourn forever.” (p. 106). Her devotion was so absolute that Marlow lies to her when he tells her that the last word Kurtz pronounced was her name. Kurtz’s painting of the Intended, in which she is blindfolded, further reinforces his assumption about her as a symbol of supposed submissiveness.

Given Aniston’s interpretation of the narcissist’s behaviour, the lack of empathy and consideration could be said to have created a narcissistic milieu for Kurtz and eventually caused him to become unempathetic. Kurtz’s indifference, which often reaches the point of cruelty, is displayed in his willingness to commit any possible violent act to gain more power. Through Marlow’s narration, we learn that Kurtz threatened to shoot the Russian for ivory and that “there was nothing on earth to prevent him killing whom he jolly well pleased.” (p.81). Considering Nietzsche’s concept of nature, there must be an order of rank in the world so that “inferior” people should not consider themselves equal to their “superiors” because, according to the philosopher, superiority is somehow based upon merit. In other words, modern man is living in an indifferent world where he is constantly struggling to prove his superiority even if this would mean exploiting and suppressing the other. This point is emphasized by Hall (2019) when she describes the narcissists’ world. She argues that, for the narcissists, “the world is a rigid and simplistic hierarchy of winners and losers, strong and weak deserving and undeserving.” (p.3). In *Heart of Darkness*, the jungle best symbolizes the world that Nietzsche and Hall describe.



The Congo is depicted as a place “without a policeman-by the way of silence-utter silence, where no warning voice of a kind of neighbour can be heard whispering of public opinion.” (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.70). In a region where there is no government or any form of authority to administer justice, Kurtz can free himself from social norms and act according to his will to power. Contact with indifference, symbolized by wilderness, urges Kurtz to dominate and exploit the other (the natives) in such a way that he can assert his existence.

Therefore, Kurtz’s will to power could also be viewed as an expression of his fear of being dominated and exploited by the other. Thus, Kurtz abuses those who would oppose him to maintain his sense of superiority. We can deduce that both the ideology of white supremacy and the indifference characterizing the modern world have led Kurtz to developing a narcissistic personality disorder. Even worse, both conditions have made injustice, abuse, and brutality appear as unquestionable facts.

2. Exploitative narcissistic behaviour under the veneer of civilization

Lerner (2009), a psychologist and the senior Clinical Advisor for Crossroads Recovery center in Argentina, argues that “narcissists create a web of seduction intimidation and control [and the victims always have] a feeling of being under a spell, trapped in their inability to leave and their reluctance to stay.” (p.5). In *Heart of Darkness*, Kurtz appears as a talented man with an “unbounded power of eloquence.” (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.72) Marlow observes that Kurtz “was not common [and he] had the power to charm or to frighten rudimentary souls into an aggravated witch-dance in his honor.” It has been reported by all the company agents that Kurtz had huge plans for improving the Africans’ conditions of life, bringing technology, and spreading knowledge. It has also been noted that Kurtz was the only white man who could resist the harsh tropical climate, which reflects not only his robust physical constitution but also his strong personality.

As the plot unfolds, we learn that Kurtz was able to charm the white imperialists. A good example of the Europeans who have fallen under Kurtz’s spell and who strongly believe in his mission and great plans is the Russian trader. Although Kurtz threatened to shoot the Russian for some ivory, the latter still did not judge him: “You can’t judge Mr. Kurtz as you would an ordinary man.” (p.80). The Russian’s unreflective devotion to Kurtz is indicative of Kurtz’s great manipulative skills to legitimise and normalize



violence. What is even more surprising is Kurtz's capacity to inspire devotion even among those whom he exploits. The Russian describes to Marlow the influence Kurtz exercises over the Africans: "They adored him...he came to them with thunder and lightning...and they had never seen something like that." Kurtz enters the Congo as a man of promise with a noble mission of civilizing the Congolese, but he also comes with thunder and lightning, which hints to the deceptive methods that he has used to win the obedience and devotion of the local natives.

In an attempt to better understand how Kurtz deceives the natives, we rely on Evans's (2023) argument which goes as follows: "[Narcissists] are gathering data; they collect and retain whatever information they think they use against you." (p.34). To achieve this aim, narcissists should get closer to their victims. This is exactly how Kurtz treats the natives. Kurtz lived among the Congolese, which allowed him to get closer to them. To some degree, he even formed an alliance with them when he had a relationship with an African woman, Kurtz's mistress. Having lived among the local natives for an exceptionally long time, Kurtz could learn about their needs and weaknesses, which helped him exploit them to his advantage.

In addition to promising enlightenment to the Congolese, which kept them dreaming against all odds, Kurtz manipulated their local religion and beliefs to make them view him as a supernatural aura. He portrayed himself as a god and persuaded the natives to offer him "unspeakable rites" (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.71) and sacrifices to keep him healthy and strong. To be more persuasive and to make the whole show look credible, Kurtz took part in the "midnight dances" and rituals performed in his honor. As time passes by, the Africans will grow to be overly reliant on the god-like figure with the hope that one day they will receive the blessings of the civilizing mission.

To continue controlling the Africans, Kurtz will use brutal force. Evans (2023) points out that if the victim questions the narcissist's authority, the latter "will be extremely angry and attempt vengeance" (p.36). In *Heart of Darkness*, Marlow reports a heart-touching description of the indigenous inhabitants of Africa who are overworked, tortured, and left all alone to die: "Black shapes crouched, lay, sat between the trees leaning against the trunks, clinging to the earth, half coming out, half effaced within the dim light, in all the attitudes of pain, abandonment and despair." (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.24) In an indifferent world where suppressing the other is a legitimate means to



assert one's supremacy, to recall Nietzsche's philosophy, Kurtz can strengthen his power and maintain control by destroying the natives.

Not only did Kurtz cause the natives physical suffering, but he also destroyed their land. Marlow's visits to the different stations are good illustrations of how the civilizing mission in Africa proved a nightmare. Marlow describes a "rail-way track lying there on its back with its wheel in the air...pieces of decaying machinery [and] a stack of rusty rails." (p.22). The chaotic state of the stations is evidence that emancipation and progress in the Congo are only false promises

Manipulation and brutal force will progressively create an environment full of psychological harm. According to Barker (2023), being exposed to narcissistic manipulation and abuse for a long period of time will not only affect the victim's physical health, but it will also cause depression because the victim's focus becomes survival within the abusive dynamic rather than wellbeing. The scene where Marlow depicts a group of "unhappy" (p.22) Africans who passed him with "a complete deathlike indifference" reveals the effects of psychological harm on the victims. Abuse turned the local natives into helpless, hopeless, and extremely withdrawn individuals.

3. Darkness and wilderness as reflections of Kurtz's self-image: from a civilized rescuer to a narcissist savage abuser

The psychoanalyst Lowen (1985) remarks: "Narcissists can be identified by their lack of humanness."(p. X) In *Heart of Darkness*, the greatest atrocity committed by Kurtz is revealed when he places the heads of the rebel natives around his house to prove his power and assert his god-like image: "These heads were the heads of the rebels...There had been enemies, criminals, workers...Those rebellious heads looked very subdued to me on their sticks." (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.84) Kurtz's barbaric act unveils the savagery of the imperialists behind the mask of humanity.

Marlow, who was so impressed with Kurtz's eloquence in the beginning, is now shocked to see a civilized man falling into the forces of primitivism: "Mr. Kurtz lacked restraint in the gratification of his various lusts... there was something wanting in him-some small matter which, when the pressing need arose, could not be found under his magnificent eloquence." (p.83) Kurtz is what the natives of the Congo could become in a lawless environment; yet they do not seem to present any narcissistic traits.

The horrific description of the heads stuck on poles reveals that violence is the imperialists' language, not that of the natives. The steamboat scene is a good illustration of how harmless the indigenous of the land are. Their attack on the steamer was defensive rather than aggressive. We soon learn that the natives attacked the steamer only because they received instructions from Kurtz to do so, a fact which exposes Kurtz's aggressive nature, not theirs. Marlow points out that their cries "had not the fierce character boding of immediate hostile intention." (p.61)

What stresses even much the natives' self-control is the fact that they did not attack the white crew to eat their flesh though they were terribly starving. Marlow wonders what restrains them, and can find no answer: "Why in the name of all the gnawing devils of hunger they didn't go for us... amazes me now when I think of it... And I saw that something restraining, one of those human secrets.... What possible restraint?... But there was the fact facing me, the fact dazzling to be seen." (pp.60-61). One can observe that the so-called savage Africans show restraint that the "civilized" European imperialists have never demonstrated towards them because they lack it themselves.

Psychoanalysts note that narcissists tend to project their shortcomings onto others to protect their grandiose self. In support of this argument, it has been reported that one of the narcissists' common defensive mechanisms to "shore self-esteem [is the] projection of negative aspects of self and affects onto others." (Diamond et.al., p.103). This argument brings to the fore the imperialists' false projections onto the Africans. In the novel, Kurtz's atrocious violence is justified by the imperialists' claim that the indigenous inhabitants of the Congo are savages. It could be argued that the narcissist Kurtz wants to transfer the barbarism in him onto the Africans to shift the blame away from him and mask his true self. Therefore, in a narcissistic environment, false projections, which constitute another form of abuse, are justified and normalized in order to subjugate the African people.

The Psychoanalyst Lowen (1985) makes it clear that many fears engulf the narcissists' mind, and of all these fears, the fear of coming close with their true self is the one that consumes them the most. He adds that when this feeling of insanity is raised, the narcissist "will mobilize all [his] defenses." (p.100). These defenses allow the narcissist, at least temporarily, to take away his fears.

In *Heart of Darkness*, the darkness and wilderness of the jungle are symbolically used to convey madness, fear, and hollowness. The more Kurtz

is penetrating into the jungle, the more he is getting closer to his mad and hollow self, which makes him experience intense feelings of terror. The jungle seduces Kurtz and invites him to conquer it; then it consumes his flesh and soul. Indeed, the decline of Kurtz's physical and mental health becomes obvious at the end of the novel when Kurtz appears as "an animated image of death carved out of old ivory." (Conrad, 1902/1994, p.85) However, as a narcissist, the dying Kurtz cannot admit failure to himself and desperately continues to assert his supremacy through threats: "Sick! Sick! Not so sick as you would like to believe. Never mind. I will carry my ideas out yet- I will return. I will show you what can be done. You with your little peddling notions-You are interfering with me. I will return..." (p.88). Threats, rage, and anger are all defenses that Kurtz mobilizes whenever he experiences feelings of insanity and fear. In so doing, Kurtz attempts to spread fear for fear of allowing his weakness and imperfections to be exposed. However, the wilderness will soon distort Kurtz mentally and eventually lead to his downfall. Marlow elucidates:

Kurtz's soul was mad. Being alone in the wilderness it had looked within itself, and, by heavens! I tell you it had gone mad. I had-for my sins, I suppose-to go through the ordeal of looking into it myself. No eloquence could have so withered to one's belief in mankind as his final burst of sincerity. He struggled with himself, too. I saw it-I heard it I saw the inconceivable mystery of a soul that knew no restraint...struggling blindly with itself. (pp.96-7)

Kurtz's last words "The horror! The horror!" (p.100) reveal Kurtz's final meeting with his true self that Marlow describes as "some vision." One may assume that Kurtz finally admits to himself all the horrors, atrocities, and tyrannical reign over the Africans. However, his utterances, which may imply some sort of moral vision, are whispered just at the point of death. Indeed, one may wonder why Kurtz did not experience any moment of self-realization before being so close to death. Besides, judgment and self-reflection do not necessarily express remorse and regret. In fact, it is not clear whether Kurtz would have changed for the better if he had lived. Although answers to these questions remain unclear, one can assume that Kurtz, as a narcissist, can only exist in his illusory world in which he can maintain his sophisticated façade; and any contact with the atrocious reality about his hollow self would mean his death. Similarly, the experience of imperialism is perpetuated through deceit and lies, and questioning the



beliefs and ideologies which are used to justify imperialism would reveal the imperialists' real motives and would eventually dismantle the policy.

Conclusion

The central concern of the present article was to examine whether abuse, exploitation, and brutality in Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* are the consequences of the psychological and cultural conditions characterizing Europe at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century. More precisely, we attempted to verify whether the conditions of the time were in support of nurturing and normalizing narcissism as a cultural as well as a psychological condition. Therefore, the main hypothesis generating from the chief interest of the present article was to prove that Kurtz belongs to a narcissistic environment which has turned him into an authoritarian narcissist and which has eventually legitimized and normalized his abusive rule over the Africans.

Our study has shown that the environment plays a crucial role in shaping a narcissistic personality. Indeed, psychoanalysts have revealed that the main environmental causes behind narcissism are overestimation and neglect. Our analysis of *Heart of Darkness* has proven that the ideology of white supremacy promoted by the European imperialists might well have resulted in Kurtz's sense of supremacy and legitimated his position as a "god" of the Congo. By virtue of his superior race, Kurtz has entitled himself the right to rule over the so-called savage black natives in order to civilize them. Also, it has been noted that the modern age was marked by the collapse of the traditional Western belief system, causing a crisis for human culture. The result of this was the emergence of a new mode of thinking which denied value, unity, truth, and being in the world. Nietzsche's philosophical concepts, the Will to Power in particular, which emphasized the importance of embracing the fullness of one's desire for power justified the driving force behind the individual's pursuit of dominance. Our examination of the novel has exposed Kurtz as a brutal character who strives for power with complete disregard for the indigenous inhabitants of the Congo.

In a lawless, indifferent, and chaotic environment, symbolized by the jungle, Kurtz is turned into an abusive leader who exploits, tortures, and even exterminates the Congolese to assert his existence and keep his powerful position. Therefore, our study has brought us to draw the conclusion that the environmental conditions highly contributed into shaping Kurtz's personality and transforming him into a tyrant narcissist.



Our findings have equally put forth seduction as the main instrument of manipulation used by Kurtz to make the Africans submit to his will. A close scrutiny of the relationship between Kurtz and the local natives revealed Kurtz's highly developed manipulative skills. Kurtz sets himself up in the Congo as a charming leader, a man with a noble mission, and a savior. Kurtz's promises and idealistic notions of bringing progress and enlightenment, though deceitful, have charmed the natives and created some sort of dependence and obedience.

Moreover, it was shown that submission is maintained through brutal force and psychological abuse. The white imperialists chaining the Congolese like animals, forcing them to work extremely hard, cruelly beating them, and threatening them to death are all instances of physical harm. Also, exposure to manipulation and brutality turned the natives into unhappy and hopeless individuals who lost their taste for life. Furthermore, it was disclosed that Kurtz does not content himself with abusing the local natives; he projects his brutality and savagery onto them in order to justify his abusive treatment and maintain his glorified image. As psychoanalysts maintain that seduction, dependence, abusive control, and transference are the main mechanisms through which a narcissist operates, the results of our study could be regarded as further evidence of Kurtz's narcissism.

Based on the findings above, it becomes clear that narcissism in *Heart of Darkness* could be viewed as both a psychological and a cultural condition. A world where power, wealth, and dominance are more valuable than humanity and morals has proven itself to be fertile ground for narcissism. Abuse, corruption, subjugation, and violation of human rights are legitimized and normalized through deceit and manipulation.

In the novel, Conrad depicts a deceitful world where Kurtz's barbarism and dehumanization of the natives are justified on the pretext of bringing civilization and enlightenment to the so-called uncivilized people. Although all Kurtz can bring to the Congo is death, Kurtz's abusive control which is maintained through lies, deceit, and brutality is unquestioned. Over time, people living in a narcissistic world may become used to narcissism to the point of regarding it as a normal condition of life. Only self-reflection may save modern man. Marlow, though belonging to the same environment, has the ability to recognize the barbarism and evil surrounding him and eventually distance himself. Marlow's self-awareness could be said to have saved him from being consumed by evil.



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