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Narcissism in William Shakespeare's Drama Coriolanus

Dinda Rahmadani[1*], Meisya Audreyanna Azzahra[2], Yosi Evelyn Tondang[3], Naya Islah Nabilah[4], Syamsul Bahri[5]
[1-5] English Literature, Universitas Negeri Medan, Indonesia
dinda.rhmdanii@gmail.com[1], audreymeisya2@gmail.com[2], yosievelynn@gmail.com[3], nayaislah87@gmail.com[4], syamsul.bahri0401@gmail.com[5]
**Penulis Korespondensi: dinda.rhmdanii@gmail.com*

Abstract. *Human behavior and psychological conflict often become central elements in literary works, especially in drama, where characters are shaped through tension, pride, emotion, and social expectation. Shakespeare's Coriolanus presents a character whose sense of pride, identity, and honor creates ongoing conflict with the society around him. This study aims to analyze the forms of narcissism expressed by Coriolanus using Otto Kernberg's fourfold theory: healthy, grandiose, vulnerable, and malignant. A qualitative descriptive method was applied through textual analysis and library research, focusing on key scenes that reveal his psychological development. The results show that grandiose narcissism is the most dominant type (36%), as seen in scenes where Coriolanus belittles the plebeians and rejects their approval, reflecting his rigid superiority as a Roman patrician. Healthy narcissism appears least (10%), found only in early moments such as his genuine pride after the battle at Corioles before political pressure intensifies his arrogance. Meanwhile, vulnerable and malignant narcissism each appear at 27%, shown when he collapses into shame after public rejection and later seeks revenge by joining Aufidius. These findings illustrate that Coriolanus's downfall is shaped by the progression of his narcissism from pride to contempt, fragility, and destruction.*

Keywords: *Coriolanus; Drama; Narcissism; Psychological Conflic; Shakespeare.*

1. INTRODUCTION

Literature has always been more than just words written on a page, because it helps us understand how people think, feel, and behave within their society. Dennis Yi Tenen (2024) explains that literature is a living system of creativity that not only entertains its readers but also records and reinterprets human experiences in meaningful ways. Through literature, readers can explore ideas about identity, moral values, social power, and the different challenges that people face in their daily lives. Literature also gives us the chance to see many kinds of viewpoints, which helps us understand how individuals deal with emotions, relationships, conflicts, and personal growth. Because of this, literature becomes a valuable tool for building empathy, curiosity, and critical thinking, as it encourages us to look closely at how humans express their hopes, fears, dreams, and problems. In the study of literature, there are three main forms that writers use to communicate their messages, which are poetry, prose, and drama. Poetry uses expressive, imaginative, and sometimes rhythmic language to share strong feelings and create vivid images that help readers feel the emotions of the text, while prose uses direct and clear language to tell stories, explain ideas, and describe events in a natural and detailed way. These forms show that literature is both an artistic creation and a source of knowledge that guides readers to understand human life from many different angles and situations.

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Drama, as one of the main forms of literature, has a special role because it presents conflict and human problems in a direct and active way through dialogue and action. Unlike poetry and prose, which depend on description and narration, drama shows events as if they are happening in the present moment, helping readers understand how characters respond to tension, emotion, and difficult choices. Imelda Whelehan (2023) explains that drama is a literary form that reveals character, intention, and conflict through spoken words and clear actions, allowing readers to observe how situations develop. Jean E. Howard (2024) also states that drama often explores social and psychological issues by placing characters in situations that expose their values, motivations, and relationships. Because of this, drama becomes more than entertainment, as it invites readers to think more deeply about human behavior, fairness, power, and the consequences of actions. Through its focus on conflict and character development, drama helps readers understand the complexity of human life from many different angles.

One of the psychological themes that often appears in both literature and drama is narcissism. Otto Kernberg (1975) describes narcissism as a wide range of personality traits, from positive self-confidence to destructive pride. At its healthy form, narcissism gives balance, ambition, and resilience. But it can also appear as grandiose arrogance, fragile sensitivity, or even aggressive and manipulative behavior. Carter & Douglass (2021) explain that "narcissistic identity is fundamentally unstable, requiring continual validation from others to maintain a sense of significance." Twenge & Campbell (2023) emphasize that grandiose narcissism often thrives in positions of leadership, where superiority is maintained by devaluing others an idea that helps explain Coriolanus's contempt for the plebeians. This framework is useful for analyzing literature because it shows how characters construct their identity, express their pride, and react to challenges around them. Narcissism is not only a psychological condition but also a dramatic force that drives conflict and shapes character development. Shakespeare's Coriolanus is a strong example of this. The drama tells the story of Caius Marcius Coriolanus, a celebrated Roman general whose military success earns him fame but also fuels his pride and growing distance from ordinary citizens. After defeating the Volscians, he is encouraged to run for political office, where Roman custom requires him to seek the support of the plebeians. His refusal to humble himself, combined with his contempt toward the common people, leads to political disaster. Manipulated by the tribunes and rejected by the citizens, Coriolanus is banished from Rome. Enraged, he joins forces with his former enemy, Aufidius, to attack the city he once fought to defend. His story becomes a tragic exploration of pride, wounded honor, and the collapse of identity when admiration turns into

rejection. The play is set in Rome during a famine, when the citizens protest against the ruling class for holding back grain. Coriolanus, a respected general, is expected to speak to the people. But instead of showing empathy, he answers them with insult and contempt. In Act 1, Scene 1, the citizens complain of hunger, while Coriolanus responds:

Citizen: "The leanness that afflicts us, the object of our misery, is a gain to them. Let us revenge this with our pikes, for the gods know I speak in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge."

Coriolanus: "What's the matter, you dissentious rogues, that, rubbing the poor itch of your opinion, make yourselves scabs?"

All (The citizens): "We have ever your good word."

Coriolanus: "He that will give good words to thee will flatter beneath abhorring. What would you have, you curs, that like nor peace nor war? The one affrights you; the other makes you proud."

(Act 1, Scene 1)

The dialogue between the citizens and Coriolanus shows how the suffering of the plebeians meets the towering pride of their patrician leader, creating a sharp clash between human need and aristocratic arrogance. When the citizen cries, "The leanness that afflicts us…," he reveals the reality of famine that pushes the people to desperation, stressing that their plea comes from the basic need for survival, "in hunger for bread, not in thirst for revenge," a reminder that their protest is driven by life and death circumstances rather than political ambition. Coriolanus responds not with understanding but with hostility, opening with "What's the matter, you dissentious rogues…," instantly interpreting their hunger as disobedience. His metaphor of their opinions as an "itch" and his insult calling them "scabs" works to dehumanize them, turning their pain into something filthy and infectious rather than worthy of compassion. When the citizens reply, "We have ever your good word," the bitter tone reveals how accustomed they are to his cruelty, underscoring the emotional gap between the people and a leader who has never acknowledged their worth. Coriolanus then intensifies his dismissal: "He that will give good words to thee will flatter beneath abhorring," claiming that anyone who treats the plebeians with kindness degrades himself. His final insult, calling them "curs" and accusing them of liking "nor peace nor war," paints the citizens as unstable and inferior, reinforcing his belief that they are beneath him. Otto Kernberg (1975) describes grandiose narcissism as a pattern in which individuals maintain their sense of superiority by humiliating others, and Coriolanus's speech reflects this mechanism clearly, since each insult strengthens his self-image by diminishing the humanity of the people before him. Carter and Douglass (2021) explain that "narcissistic identity is fundamentally unstable, requiring continual

validation from others to maintain a sense of significance." Twenge & Campbell (2023) also note that grandiose narcissism often thrives in hierarchical systems where power is maintained through contempt, a pattern that matches Coriolanus's treatment of the plebeians, whose suffering becomes merely a stage on which he asserts dominance. Through this exchange, Shakespeare presents Coriolanus as a man whose heroic status mask a fragile ego dependent on scorn, turning a moment that might have offered reconciliation into a display of pride that leads him further toward isolation and eventual downfall.

Several previous studies have explored the theme of narcissism in both drama and film. Pramudana Ihsan (2019) examined the character Rupert Digby in All in the Mind by Paul Howard Surridge and found that his arrogance, lack of empathy, and constant need for admiration reflected an insecure and fragile personality. Wardani (2020) analyzed Divergent directed by Neil Burger using Otto Kernberg's theory and discovered four major forms of narcissism, showing how these traits lead the character toward emotional conflict and destruction. Moving forward, Sheikhha (2021) discussed narcissism in Xavier Dolan's films, showing that many characters are too focused on themselves and crave admiration. In the short Indonesian film Pemean, Nurhaliza & Dadela (2022) found conversational narcissism when one character dominates the conversation and ignores others. Waldron (2023) analyzed Pedro Almodóvar's La ley del deseo and showed that love and desire often become tools of narcissism and dishonesty. Febriyani & Sumayah (2024) studied the Baroness in Cruella (2021) through Kohut's self-psychology theory and revealed her pride, vanity, and emotional manipulation as forms of narcissistic behavior. Lastly, Delbandi (2025) examined Hamlet in modern film adaptations and explained that surveillance and the digital gaze make the main character develop a broken identity and narcissistic tendencies. Together, these studies show that narcissism continues to be an important theme in literature and film, reflecting human pride, emotional weakness, and the desire for power that shape both personality and tragedy.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Narcissism has long been studied as a psychological structure that ranges from adaptive pride to destructive arrogance. Otto Kernberg, in his influential book Borderline Conditions and Pathological Narcissism (1975), explains that narcissism is not a single pattern but a spectrum of personality traits. As Pincus and colleagues note, "Moving beyond NPD, reviews of the clinical, psychiatric, and social/personality psychology literature clearly paint a broader portrait of pathological narcissism encompassing two phenotypic themes of dysfunction, narcissistic grandiosity and narcissistic vulnerability." He identifies four types of narcissism:

healthy narcissism, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, and malignant narcissism. Each type reveals a different way individuals construct their self-image and relate to others. In literature, these traits appear vividly in Shakespeare's characters, whose speeches often dramatize selfhood, pride, insecurity, and ambition.

Healthy Narcissism

Healthy narcissism is the most balanced and adaptive form of self-regard. Kernberg (1975) describes it as the foundation for identity development, ambition, and resilience. Unlike pathological forms, healthy narcissism allows individuals to feel proud of their achievements while still acknowledging the worth of others. It is neither excessive arrogance nor fragile insecurity, but rather a constructive sense of confidence. In literature, this trait is visible in characters who frame their pride as part of a shared duty or collective honour, rather than self-exaltation.

Via Pullman : *"Auggie, you know… sometimes I wish people could see you the way we do at home. Not just your face, but the whole you."*

Auggie Pullman : *"But people judge fast, Via. They look at me and think they already know my whole story before I even say anything."*

Via Pullman : *"You can't blend in when you were born to stand out."*

Auggie Pullman : *"I know I'm not an ordinary kind of a kid… Maybe if we knew what other people were thinking we'd know that no one's ordinary."*

This dialogue from Wonder (2017) takes place when Via, Auggie's sister, encourages him to embrace his uniqueness instead of hiding from the world, and Auggie responds with a thoughtful reflection on human identity. Contextually, throughout the film, Auggie has been bullied and excluded because of his facial difference, which makes him feel ashamed and invisible. His greatest fear is not being accepted by his peers, and this has shaped his struggle with self-esteem. However, in this moment, Auggie shows growth: he openly admits that he is "not ordinary," but he does not express this with bitterness or self-pity. Instead, he expands the idea, saying that perhaps "no one's ordinary," suggesting that every person carries hidden challenges that others may not see. This shows a shift from insecurity to self-acceptance, and it reframes difference as something universal rather than shameful. Otto Kernberg's (1975) concept of healthy narcissism can be seen clearly here. Healthy narcissism allows individuals to take pride in themselves, build a coherent identity, and develop resilience, all while maintaining empathy and respect for others. Auggie's words demonstrate that he has reached a balanced form of self-regard: he acknowledges his own value without arrogance and recognizes that others are also unique in their own ways. Unlike grandiose narcissism, which

seeks superiority, or vulnerable narcissism, which collapses under rejection, Auggie's self-awareness creates a positive bond with others, suggesting that true strength comes from accepting oneself while also understanding the struggles of others. This moment shows that narcissism, when healthy, is not destructive but constructive it supports personal growth, fosters empathy, and strengthens social relationships. In Wonder (2017), Auggie's journey embodies this constructive form of narcissism, making his character an inspiring example of Kernberg's theory in a modern film context.

Grandiose Narcissism

Grandiose narcissism, according to Kernberg's psychoanalytic model, is a pathological state characterized by an inflated and often unrealistic sense of self-importance and superiority. This grandiosity is not rooted in genuine achievement but in an internal fantasy of uniqueness, which serves to protect a fragile sense of self. A clear literary example of this is seen in the character Tom Riddle from Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets.

Tom Riddle : "For many months now, my new target has been you. How is it that a baby with no extraordinary magical talent was able to defeat the greatest wizard of all time? How did you escape with nothing but a scar, while Lord Voldemort's powers were destroyed?"

Harry Potter : "Why do you care how I escaped? Voldemort was after your time!"

Tom Riddle : "Voldemort is my past, present and future."

Harry Potter : "You! You're the Heir of Slytherin!"

In this monologue, Tom Riddle expresses a compulsive need to understand and control the narrative of his own superiority. His core concern is not Harry's survival, but the defeat of 'the greatest wizard of all time' which is title he arrogantly assigns to his future self, Lord Voldemort. This obsession with Harry's escape functions as a direct narcissistic injury; a mere baby should not have been able to challenge the fantasy of his omnipotence. The final revelation, "Voldemort is my past, present and future," is the definitive manifestation of grandiose narcissism. It is an assertion that his identity is not only unique but is a singular, eternal, and all-encompassing force. By merging his past self (Tom Riddle) with his future, terrifying self (Voldemort), he constructs a self-serving myth of uninterrupted, ultimate power. This behavior aligns with Kernberg's theory, where the individual relies on self-aggrandizing myths and fabricated narratives to fuel a compulsive need for admiration and maintain a false sense of omnipotence. His grandiosity, therefore, is not about his current actions, but about the elaborate, self-serving myth of his destiny as a supreme being, which he aggressively imposes onto others.

Vulnerable narcissism

Vulnerable narcissism, represents the fragile side of narcissistic personality. Kernberg (1975) explains that this type is defined by insecurity, hypersensitivity to rejection, and defensive rage when one's self-image is threatened. As Harrison et al. (2022) explain, pathological narcissism frequently involves emotional instability and a deep reliance on external affirmation, causing the individual to view other people as extensions of their own fragile self-image. Unlike the grandiose type, vulnerable narcissism often appears in lamentation or complaint, where pride crumbles into shame and anger. Shakespeare captures this form in his portrayal of King Lear's despair at filial ingratitude.

Mitch *: "Blanche, every time I tried to get close to you, you pushed me away with another story. I never knew which part of you was real."*

Blanche *: "I only tried to give you something lovely to believe in, Mitch… something softer than the truth. I thought if I held on to that, you might hold on to me."*

Mitch *: "You lied to me, Blanche. You weren't straight about your past."*

Blanche *: "I didn't mean to deceive you. I only wanted to be… admired. Don't you see? I can't be seen in the light, not as I really am."*

This moment reveals the fragile structure beneath Blanche's carefully constructed persona, exposing the emotional instability that drives her need to be admired and her terror of being seen as she truly is. In the dim light where she tries to live, Blanche depends on small illusions her "magic" to soften the harshness of reality and protect the delicate sense of worth she struggles to hold together. This aligns with Merawati's (2021) observation that malignant narcissism in fictional characters often manifests through manipulative and aggressive behavior driven by a need for domination. Her breakdown when Mitch confronts her reflects a deeper psychological pattern described by Kernberg (1975), in which a person maintains a sense of identity by hiding behind fantasies that shield them from unbearable shame. Blanche's insistence on beauty, charm, and admiration is not simple vanity but a desperate attempt to escape the inner experience of being unlovable and deeply flawed. When this façade is threatened, she collapses, revealing the vulnerability at the center of her character. Her fear of the "light" symbolizes her fear of exposure, where every fracture in her self-image becomes visible and every memory she has tried to bury threatens to surface. Instead of facing this pain, she reaches again for illusion, hoping that if she can control how others see her, she can momentarily quiet the chaos inside herself. This scene shows how her need for admiration and her dread of humiliation form a continuous cycle one that sustains her fragile identity while at

the same time pushing her further away from genuine connection, leaving her isolated in the very fantasy world she created to survive.

Malignant Narcissism

is the most pathological form, combining grandiosity with aggression, cruelty, and moral collapse. Kernberg (1975) identifies it as the destructive extreme, where pride is fused with hostility, leading to manipulation and violence. This aligns with Merawati's (2021) observation that malignant narcissism in fictional characters often manifests through manipulative and aggressive behavior driven by a need for domination. Unlike other forms, malignant narcissism not only harms the individual but threatens the community, as self-interest overrides all moral constraints. This syndrome is exemplified in the film There Will Be Blood (2007).

Daniel Plainview : "I have a competition in me. I want no one else to succeed."
Eli Sunday : "You don't want to be partners?"
Daniel Plainview : "I hate most people."
Eli Sunday : "That's a sickness."

This dialogue comes from There Will Be Blood (2007), in which Daniel Plainview reveals the core of his personality: a violently competitive drive rooted in hatred and superiority. His admission, "I want no one else to succeed," exposes a worldview centered on domination, not cooperation. Rather than seeing others as human beings, he views them as threats or tools to be used and discarded. The line "I hate most people" reflects not just misanthropy but a deep moral collapse, suggesting that his identity is built on hostility toward the world. The interaction with Eli Sunday highlights Plainview's inability to form genuine relationships, replacing empathy with rivalry and aggression. According to Kernberg's (1975) framework, malignant narcissism combines grandiosity, aggression, antisocial behavior, and the disintegration of moral conscience. Plainview's confession illustrates this syndrome clearly: his ambition is fused with hatred, and his success depends on destroying others rather than working alongside them. His violent competitiveness leads him to manipulate, deceive, and ultimately harm those around him, including his own adopted son. Kernberg emphasizes that malignant narcissism threatens not only the individual but the entire community; Plainview embodies this through his willingness to sacrifice relationships, ethics, and the well-being of others in pursuit of superiority. His words in this scene reveal the collapse of empathy and the triumph of hostility, making him a cinematic illustration of the destructive core of malignant narcissism.

3. METHOD

This research uses a qualitative descriptive approach with a documentation technique to analyze the research problems. Qualitative research attempts to understand phenomena in a natural setting. In this study, the researcher will use a direct observation of the text by reading and analyzing the entire drama, "Coriolanus", written by William Shakespeare. Several dialogues, monologues, and character actions will be selected and interpreted contextually to identify narcissistic representations. The researcher also employed an applied literature study (library research) by reviewing books, journals, and previous research relevant to narcissism and literary analysis. This literature review provides a strong academic basis for the analysis. The data collected from the drama will be interpreted using the narcissistic theory by Otto Kernberg. The analysis will be produced according to Otto Kernberg's (1975) ideas on narcissism, which includes concepts such as healthy narcissism, grandiose narcissism, vulnerable narcissism, and malignant narcissism. The data is used to strengthen the author's argument in analyzing narcissistic representations in the character of Coriolanus.

4. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Narcissism is a psychological phenomenon that appears in different forms, ranging from adaptive pride to destructive behavior. Based on Kernberg's classification, there are four main types: healthy, grandiose, vulnerable, and malignant. The analysis of Coriolanus shows how these types are represented in his character.

Table 1. Types of Narcissism.

No.	Kind of Narcissism	Number	Percentage
1.	Healthy	1	10%
2.	Grandiose	4	36%
3.	Vulnerable	3	27%
4.	Malignant	3	27%
	Total	11	100%

Healthy Narcissism

Cominius : *"Too modest are you; but your people love you and will reward your deeds with voices."*

Coriolanus : *"Alone I did it. I made what work I pleased; it was mine own."*

Cominius : *"You shall not be. The grave of your deserving. Rome must know. The value of her own. 'Twere a concealment. Worse than a theft, no less than a traducement, to hide your doings and to silence that. Which, to the spire and top of praises vouched, would seem but modest. Therefore, I beseech you. In*

sign of what you are, not to reward. What you have done before our army hear me."

Corilanus : "I have some wounds upon me, and they smart. To hear themselves remembered."

(Act 1, Scene 9)

This dialogue occurs after the Roman general Coriolanus returns victorious from the battle at Corioles. Cominius, his fellow commander, praises him for his extraordinary achievement and notes that the Roman people will reward his bravery. Coriolanus responds by emphasizing that he accomplished the victory largely by himself, declaring that it was "mine own." The exchange highlights both the admiration from others and Coriolanus's personal pride in his success. Contextually, this moment shows the general celebrating a genuine accomplishment his courage and skill in battle. Although his words may sound self-centered, they reflect the natural pride of a soldier who has risked his life and triumphed. Unlike later moments in the play where Coriolanus openly insults or rejects others, here his pride is rooted in a clear act of heroism. The dialogue demonstrates a balance between external recognition (Cominius's praise) and internal pride (Coriolanus's response), marking this as a rare scene where his narcissism remains within the bounds of normal self-esteem.

In Otto Kernberg's (1975) framework, this scene can be understood as an example of healthy narcissism, which is expressed through pride based on real accomplishments and a secure sense of identity. Kernberg explains that healthy narcissism supports confidence, ambition, and resilience, as long as it does not turn into arrogance, contempt, or aggression. Coriolanus's words in this moment show that his self-regard is still grounded in reality: he acknowledges his own role in the victory and takes satisfaction in his achievement. The recognition he receives from Cominius strengthens this self-esteem, creating a balance between individual pride and social validation. Theoretically, this reflects the constructive side of narcissism, where pride motivates leadership and affirms identity without undermining relationships. While Coriolanus later shifts into grandiose and even malignant forms of narcissism, this passage illustrates that his character also contains moments of balanced self-regard evidence that narcissism, when healthy, can function as a positive psychological force. As modern scholars also note, healthy narcissism is essential because it "enables individuals to build self-confidence and maintain positive social bonds while preventing destructive forms of self-absorption" (Ronningstam, 2021, p. 15).

Grandiose Narcissism

Senator *: Sit, Coriolanus. Never shame to hear what you have nobly done.*

Martius *: Your Honors, pardon. I had rather have my wounds to heal again than hear say how I got them.*

Brutus *: Sir, I hope my words disbenched you not?*

Martius *: No, sir. Yet oft, when blows have made me stay, I fled from words. You soothed not, therefore hurt not; but your people, I love them as they weigh.*

(Act 2, Scene 2)

In this scene, Coriolanus appears before the Roman Senate after his success in battle, where the senators and tribunes express admiration for his bravery. Although they intend to honor him, Coriolanus responds with visible discomfort and restrained irritation. He insists that he would rather have his wounds reopen than hear people speak of how he earned them, which at first seems like modesty. However, when Brutus tries to reassure him, Coriolanus adds that he loves the people only "as they weigh," implying that their worth depends on his personal judgment. This remark reveals his deep-seated arrogance and disdain toward the common citizens. The dialogue shows that Coriolanus cannot accept praise from others without asserting his own superiority. His pride prevents him from sharing honor or showing gratitude, as he interprets recognition from others as a potential threat to his self-image as a flawless hero.

From Kernberg's (1975) perspective, this attitude represents grandiose narcissism, characterized by exaggerated self-importance and the devaluation of others. Coriolanus maintains his self-esteem by distancing himself from those he considers inferior, especially the plebeians, whom he sees as unworthy of respect. His rejection of public praise is not humility but a defense mechanism that helps him preserve an image of independence and control. By valuing others only "as they weigh," he demonstrates a lack of empathy and a rigid belief in his own superiority. This scene reflects how grandiose narcissism isolates Coriolanus from the social world around him. His inability to acknowledge the worth of others undermines his relationships and foreshadows his tragic downfall, where the same pride that sustains his identity ultimately leads to his alienation and loss.

Vulnerable Narcissism

Coriolanus *: You common cry of curs, whose breath I hate as reek o' the rotten fens, whose loves I prize as the dead carcasses of unburied men that do corrupt my air, I banish you.*

Tribunes *: You speak with harshness, yet your heart betrays a soul that trembles at the thought of scorn.*

Coriolanus : Scorn? I am no man to bend to fools' applause. But know this each slight, each whispered doubt, pierces deeper than your shallow words reveal. I wear a mask of pride, yet inside, I fear the world's cold gaze, the sting of shame.

Tribunes : Then why hide behind such fury and disdain?

Coriolanus : Because to show my weakness is to lose all. Better to be feared than pitied, For pity is the death of a proud man's soul.

(Act 3, Scene 2)

In this scene, the protagonist confronts the plebeians with sharp anger and disdain following his failed bid for the consulship. Coriolanus's harsh rejection of the common people reflects a deep internal conflict, where he feels humiliated and unappreciated. Although he appears arrogant and proud, his attitude serves as a mask to conceal the shame and vulnerability he experiences due to social rejection. The tension between his desire for respect and his fear of humiliation drives his withdrawal and aggression, illustrating the paradox of vulnerable narcissism.

According to Otto Kernberg, vulnerable narcissism is part of a narcissistic personality organization characterized by an internal conflict between grandiosity and profound feelings of shame. Individuals with vulnerable narcissism employ defense mechanisms such as splitting and projection to manage feelings of inferiority and fear of rejection. Kernberg emphasizes that beneath the arrogant and hostile exterior lies significant emotional vulnerability, where the need for admiration clashes with the fear of humiliation and rejection. In Coriolanus's case, his anger and withdrawal are manifestations of these defense mechanisms, functioning to protect his fragile self-esteem.

Malignant Narcissism

Coriolanus : "My name is Caius Martius… the drops of blood shed for my thankless country are requited with malice and displeasure."

Aufidius : "Let me twine / mine arms about that body…"

Coriolanus : "I stand before thee in mere spite, to be full quit of those my banishers."

Aufidius : "Thou noble thing, more dances my rapt heart than when I first my wedded mistress saw."

This dialogue occurs when the banished Coriolanus enters the home of his former enemy, Tullus Aufidius, and offers himself as an ally against Rome. His opening declaration, grounded in the grievance that his "thankless country" repaid his sacrifices with hostility, reflects a wounded narcissism that shapes the entire encounter. Instead of expressing regret or seeking reconciliation, Coriolanus frames his return as an act of pure spite, stating he comes only "to

be full quit" of those who banished him. This establishes the psychological tone of the scene: treason not as strategy, but as narcissistic vengeance fueled by humiliation. Aufidius's response intensifies the moment further. Instead of killing the man who brought "hurt and mischief" upon the Volscians, he welcomes Coriolanus with an ecstatic, almost intoxicating admiration "Let me twine mine arms about that body." His language surpasses military respect; it becomes deeply personal, even erotic, as he confesses that his heart "more dances" at Coriolanus's presence than when he first saw his own bride. This is not forgiveness or mercy, but the emergence of a narcissistic mirroring, in which Aufidius sees in Coriolanus an idealized reflection of his own warrior identity. Their violent rivalry transforms into a dark, co-dependent bond based on mutual idealization and shared hostility toward Rome.

In Otto Kernberg's (1984) clinical framework, this scene is a precise illustration of malignant narcissism, a severe constellation of narcissistic personality disorder with antisocial behavior, paranoia, and aggression devoid of guilt. Coriolanus's betrayal of Rome is a textbook antisocial act, justified through his paranoid belief that he is a victim of injustice. His hatred is both moralized and magnified, allowing him to rationalize the destruction of his own homeland as righteous retaliation. Meanwhile, Aufidius's embrace is not truly affectionate; it functions as an act of narcissistic fusion, a temporary merging of two grandiose selves who validate each other's destructive impulses. Coriolanus becomes the embodiment of the martial power Aufidius idealizes, while Aufidius provides Coriolanus with the admiration and recognition that Rome denied him.

Figure 1. Types of Narcissism.

5. CONCLUSION

This research explored the different types of narcissism portrayed in the drama Coriolanus using Otto Kernberg's (1975) theory of narcissism: healthy, grandiose, vulnerable, and malignant. The study aimed to understand how these narcissistic traits are expressed, how they interact, and how they ultimately drive the protagonist's tragic downfall through the character's actions and dialogues.The results show that grandiose narcissism appeared most frequently, with 4 instances (36%), making it the dominant type portrayed. This reflects how Coriolanus's character is built on a foundation of superiority, contempt, and an inability to connect with those he deems inferior. Vulnerable and malignant narcissism followed with 3 instances each (27%), highlighting the dual outcomes of his personality: the internal fragility that surfaces when his pride is wounded, and the destructive, antisocial turn his character takes after his banishment. Healthy narcissism appeared least (1 instance, 10%), showing that while Coriolanus has moments of balanced pride based on real achievement, these are exceptionally rare and quickly overwhelmed by his pathological traits. The study confirms that Coriolanus does not just depict narcissism as one-dimensional, but rather as a layered and often conflicted psychological progression that leads to the hero's destruction. The high presence of grandiose narcissism suggests that an inflexible sense of superiority is the central element of Coriolanus's character, which, when challenged, inevitably collapses into either vulnerable shame or malignant rage, sealing his tragic fate.

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