

Howard Howe's Self-Destruction in Kevin Smith's Movie Script Tusk (2014)

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Abstract

The purpose of this thesis is to determine how misanthropy is portrayed in Kevin Smith's film *Tusk*. In this film, misanthropy is seen through the character Howard Howe, who harbors hatred and disappointment towards humans due to his life experiences. This study uses a qualitative method with a descriptive approach to explain the characteristics, causes, and effects of misanthropy as shown in the film. The main causes of Howard's misanthropy are trauma, betrayal, and failed expectations of humanity. As the story progresses, the character's misanthropic nature becomes increasingly clear through dialogue, actions, and symbols. The representation of misanthropy in this film is shown through the rejection of humans and the glorification of animals, especially walruses. Thus, the film *Tusk* shows the dark side of human psychology and the consequences of losing trust in others.

Keyword: *Howard Howe, Self-Destruction, Tusk*

INTRODUCTION

A literary work can be in many forms, for example poetry drama, and prose (Wolfreys, 2006) in which a film can be classified as a part of drama. Experts state that the power of a drama or a film deals with the ability of the characters in the performance that its readers or audience who read or watch directly it. It shows rather than tells, allowing the audience to grasp meaning through dialogue, gesture, and performance rather than long explanations (Abrams, 2018). Related to this, this article sees that a character Howard Howe in the film, *Tusk*, experiences self-destruction that hates human beings.

Self-destruction is a negative experience that alters a person's perception of the world and people as being honest, just, and reliable. This may lead to a more pessimistic view of people. When self-destruction gets this bad, people start to see cruelty as proof that they are dangerous, self-centered, or corrupt rather than as an isolated incident. At this level, self-destruction is more than just a negative feeling; it is a moral judgment toward themselves. According to Nietzsche (2006), social practices and power dynamics throughout history have shape human morality and influence how individuals view themselves and other people. He clarifies that moral judgment is frequently influenced by emotions of resentment, guilt, or disappointment, which can cause some people to form harsh or critical opinions about other people.

The writer studies that in literary work, there are values, bad or good, as well as negative views of humanity or distrust of human values are often explored in different genres of literary works, such as poetry, prose, and drama. Through the representation of characters who are full of hatred, betrayal, or disappointment towards others, misanthropy is presented as a theme that enriches the reader's understanding of the complexity of human nature. Therefore, drama not only tells a story but also shows life in motion, providing a vivid representation of the realities of human society (Woodruff, 1992).

METHOD

This article uses a qualitative descriptive research method. The study uses a qualitative descriptive design because its purpose is to explore and describe the representation of misanthropy found in Kevin Smith's *Tusk* (2014). Qualitative research is a method used to understand the meaning of a phenomenon from the participant's perspective and to interpret the data that appears in their natural context (Creswell, 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The psychological breakdown of Howard Howe, a man whose extreme loneliness has developed into a violent, self-destructive mental state, is the main focus of Kevin Smith's movie script *Tusk*. Howe's obsessive drive to reproduce the past exposes his separation from other people throughout the movie. Howe is treated as nothing more than raw material to make him spiral into insanity, completely disregarding Howe's freedom. The following proof of Howard Howe's self-destruction is offered by the quotation:

Data 1

Howe: *"This poor facsimile is the best I could do to recreate that magical enclave..." (Smith, 2014)*

The above quotation happens when Howe explains his attempt to recreate a meaningful experience from his past. He admits that the recreation is imperfect and cannot fully capture the original moment. This shows Howe's attachment to memories of a better time and his struggle to relive them.

Data 2

Howe: *"I've regretted every day my return to this wretched civilization." (Smith, 2014)*

The above quotation happens when Howe reflects on his return to human society after living in isolation. He expresses continuous regret and unhappiness with life among people. This moment shows Howe's emotional suffering and his inability to accept civilization after experiencing solitude.

Data 3

Howe: *"Never be ashamed of fear... it keeps our actions moral." (Smith, 2014)*

The above quotation happens when Howe talks about morality while explaining his view to another character. He presents fear as a guide that controls human behavior and ensures ethical actions. This shows that Howe believes morality depends more on fear than on rational judgment or inner conscience.

Data 4

Howe: *"Fight Me, Tusk! Fight Me or Die!" (Smith, 2014)*

From the quotation above happens when Howe forces Wallace, who has completely changed into a walrus, to fight for his life, the quote mentioned above occurs. Wallace is now treated by Howe as an animal motivated by instinct and cruelty rather than as a human being. Howe establishes a world absence of human values and moral reasoning by requiring Wallace to fight.

Data 5

Howe: *"You have to kill me if you want to live. And if you live? It will only be as the walrus you almost are". (Smith, 2014)*

From the quotation above happens when Howe confronts Wallace during the last phase of his transformation into a walrus, which is when the previously mentioned quotation occurs. Wallace no longer identifies as human at this point, and Howe presents violence as the only way to survive. Howe gives Wallace a choice between killing him to survive and continuing to exist as a walrus in a dehumanized form. This scene serves as the conclusion of Howe's experiment, in which cruelty and animal instinct totally replace morality, empathy, and human values.

Data 6

Howe: *"You either go full-walrus... or you go to Hell." (Smith, 2014)*

From the quotation above happens when Howe confronts Wallace after the transformation has progressed to an enduring point, the aforementioned quotation occurs. Howe gives Wallace a final, coercive decision at this point: either accept his walrus identity completely or die. Howe presents the change as a moral imperative in which defiance is viewed as a form of punishment rather than as an experiment. As existence is reduced to obedience or annihilation, this scene demonstrates how Howe denies Wallace any human choice, freedom, or moral consideration.

Data 7

HOWE: *"You did it, Mister Tusk... You are the walrus..." (Smith, 2014)*

From the quotation above happens when Howe sees Wallace completely assuming the walrus identity, which is when the previously mentioned quotation occurs. At this point, Howe publicly admits that his transformation is complete, while Wallace no longer exhibits human communication or resistance. Howe refers to Wallace as "Mister Tusk," implying that Howe has entirely erased Wallace's human identity and substituted an animal identity. In this scene, dehumanization is completely accomplished and acknowledged as a success, marking the end of Howe's experiment.

The Significance Idea Behind Self-Destruction

Immanuel Kant views self-destruction as a form of moral deviation caused by misanthropy. He argues that hatred toward humanity leads individuals to isolate themselves, lose ethical rationality, and become trapped in self-destructive resentment. In this condition, a person no longer acts according to moral reasons and fails to uphold moral obligations toward others. According to Immanuel Kant, self-destruction is a moral collapse that occurs when a person's ethical and rational life is taken over by misanthropy.

In Kantian ethics, self-destruction refers to the deterioration of moral self-governance and rational judgment rather than just physical harm. People who hate people stop participating in moral activities, reject common moral values, and feel resentment that eventually turns inward. People lose the ability to control their behavior according to universal moral law as moral reason weakens. As a result, they isolate themselves from society as well as from their own moral identity, which results in actions that compromise their integrity and ethical responsibility.

This section discusses the effect of self-destruction in *Tusk* that reflects Howard Howe. These ideas are further analyzed below:

Data 1

Howe: "This poor facsimile is the best I could do to recreate that magical enclave..." (Smith, 2014)

The quotation "This poor facsimile is the best I could do to recreate that magical enclave" highlights Howe's obsession with the past. He focuses on replicating something lost, which shows how nostalgia dominates his present actions. From the quotation above, the thesis writer analyzes that Howe engages in self-destructive behavior because he becomes trapped in obsession and nostalgia. This aligns with Kant (2006), who explains that misanthropy can cause individuals to lose moral rationality and detach from reality. Howe's statement shows that his fixation on the past prevents him from fully engaging with the present and human society.

Data 2

Howe: "I've regretted every day my return to this wretched civilization." (Smith, 2014)

The quotation "I've regretted every day my return to this wretched civilization" highlights Howe's ongoing emotional pain. He focuses on regret every day, which shows that his disappointment and resentment dominate his present life. From the quotation above, the thesis writer analyzes that Howe engages in self-destructive behavior because he remains emotionally trapped in resentment. This aligns with Kant (2006), who explains that misanthropy can make individuals lose ethical rationality and the ability to function normally. Howe's statement shows that his regret prevents him from moving forward and engaging with human society in a healthy way.

Data 3

Howe: "Never be ashamed of fear... it keeps our actions moral." (Smith, 2014)

The quotation "Never be ashamed of fear... it keeps our actions moral" highlights Howe's idea that fear governs ethical behavior. He focuses on fear as the main motivator for acting morally, rather than reason or true goodness. From the quotation above, the thesis writer analyzes that Howe engages in self-destructive behavior because he replaces moral reasoning with fear. This aligns with Kant (2006), who explains that corrupted moral judgment occurs when ethical decisions are based on external pressures rather than rational morality. Howe's statement shows that fear dominates his ethical perspective, which prevents him from developing proper moral agency.

Data 4

Howe: "Fight Me, Tusk! Fight Me or Die!" (Smith, 2014)

Immanuel Kant claims that people who hold hatred for other people isolate themselves, lose their capacity for moral reason, and get stuck in self-destructive resentment. Misanthropy is a moral deviation in which a person rejects humanity as a whole, including their own moral position, rather than just a dislike of other people (Kant, 2006). This rejection causes the person to give up on sound moral judgment in favour of destructive impulses motivated by resentment. Howe no longer acknowledges Wallace as a human being at this point, nor does he use ethical reasoning. Rather, he withdraws into his twisted reality, which reduces being to a harsh choice between dominance and death. Since Howe's hatred for people eventually turns inward, his encouragement for violence corresponds to self-destructive resentment (Kant, 2006). Howe actively contributes to his own decay and portrays a loss of moral rationality by forcing a deadly confrontation.

Data 5

Howe: "You have to kill me if you want to live. And if you live? It will only be as the walrus you almost are". (Smith, 2014)

According to Kant, people who hate people isolate themselves, lose their capacity for moral reason, and get stuck in self-destructive resentment. Misanthropy is a type of moral deviation in which a person rejects all of humanity, including their own moral position. As a result, the person acts on destructive desires because of resentment toward human existence and gives up on sound moral judgment (Kant, 2006). Howe's statement exhibits a total loss of moral rationality in line with Kant's theory. Howe denies all moral options and turns survival into a violent act by stating that Wallace must kill him in order to survive. Since he no longer believes that human life has inherent moral value, this illustrates Howe's alienation from humanity (Kant, 2006). Furthermore, Howe's acceptance of his own demise shows self-destructive resentment, in which hatred of humanity eventually becomes internalize. The dialogue thus demonstrates how Howe's misanthropy results in moral collapse, loneliness, and self-annihilating behaviour.

Data 6

Howe: "You either go full-walrus... or you go to Hell." (Smith, 2014)

Howe undermines the moral worth of human life by making Wallace choose between complete dehumanization and death. This strict instruction demonstrates Howe's separation from people since he imposes his own beliefs without any of empathy or moral judgment (Kant, 2006). Furthermore, because Howe's hatred for humanity takes the form of a violent system that ultimately results in his own moral and physical demise, the threat's extreme and absolute nature demonstrates self-destructive resentment. Kant's disagreement that misanthropy leads to moral collapse, loneliness, and destructive behaviour toward oneself and others is thus supported by the dialogue.

Data 7

HOWE: "You did it, Mister Tusk... You are the walrus..." (Smith, 2014)

Howe validates the rejection of Wallace's humanity and moral value by praising his total transformation into a walrus. This illustrates Howe's extreme alienation from people since he rejects human life completely and only finds value in the idealized animal form (Kant, 2006). Furthermore, Howe's hatred of humanity results in the fatal destruction of another human being and validates his own moral collapse, so the satisfaction he expresses in this moment betrays self-destructive resentment. Thus, the conversation exemplifies Kant's disagreement that misanthropy eventually results in moral collapse, loneliness, and negative consequences.

CONCLUSION

Individual moral destruction, where he loses moral obligation and views people as means rather than ends with self-destruction, which manifests as extreme isolation, distorted reasoning, and an inability to maintain ethical judgment and the justification of immoral actions, where he justifies violence, dehumanization, and cruelty as acceptable, are some of the consequences of his misanthropy that affect both him and other people. These consequences also affect other people, especially Wallace Bryton, who suffers physically and psychologically as a result of Howe's beliefs.

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