

**SEARCH FOR MEANING OF EXISTENCE IN STEVEN
SPIELBERG'S *WAR OF THE WORLDS* MOVIE (2005);
AN EXISTENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE**



RESEARCH PAPER

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A. Background of the Study

War of the Worlds is a 2005 science fiction movie adaptation of H. G. Wells' novel of the same name, the movie was directed by Steven Spielberg, it was written by Josh Friedman and David Koepp. *War of the Worlds* is starred by Tom Cruise as Ray Ferrier, Dakota Fanning as Rachel Ferrier, Miranda Otto as Mary Ann, Justin Chatwin as Robbie, and David Alan Basche as Tim. *War of the Worlds* movie was shot through 73 days, and using five different sound stages locations at Connecticut, New York, California, Virginia and New Jersey. This movie was distributed worldwide by Paramount Pictures and International Dream Works Pictures and premiered at the Ziegfeld Theatre on June 23, 2005, Then six days later, on June 29, the movie was released in approximately 3908 theaters across America, then the next released in United Kingdom on July 01, 2005 and The DVD was released on November 22, 2005. *War of the Worlds* has running time 118 minutes or 1 hour 58 minutes nearby 2 hours.

War of the Worlds tells much about the destruction which is done by the stranger which have a figure as an alien and also about the conflict in a family. Began with Ray Ferrier, he is a divorced dock worker which has two kids with his ex-wife Mary Ann. One day, Ray is finishing the third shift in the morning. His ex-wife Mary Ann and her new wealthy husband Tim deliver Ray the daughter Rachel and the son Robbie. They are staying with him in Bayonne, New Jersey, while Tim and Mary Anne visit her parents in Boston for the

weekend. Later that day, Ray wakes up from a rest and Rachel tells him that Robbie has stolen his car and left. Ray sets out to find him, suddenly the situation of the city was disorder, the earth cracked and there was a creatures that appear from the ground, then Ray finds Robbie, and he tells him to take care of Rachel, then after packing food, Ray and his kids abandon their home and steal the only operating vehicle in town, due to his advice of changing the solenoid in the car. They drive to Tim's large house, where they take a place of safety in the basement for the night, then in the morning Ray and his family drive towards Boston, Massachusetts.

Later, the story moves on the street and Ray asks Robbie to drive the car because he wants to sleep a little. In the evening, their van is held by a mob on the street. Ray is able to run away by firing a small revolver that he brought from his house, but the vehicle is eventually stolen by another man who took Ray's revolver after it was dropped down and who kills the man attempting to drive the van and takes his place. Ray and his children give the vehicle to the man and they continue on foot.

The story ended with the battle to defeat the alien, when the battle was happening Ray and Rachel are offered shelter in a basement by a man named Harlan Ogilvy (Tim Robbins) who lost his family to the aliens. From the start Ogilvy have signs of mental stress. Ray concerned that the action of Ogilvy is endangers himself and his daughter, murders Ogilvy as a means of silencing him. After they are free, Ray and his daughter continue to move towards Boston. He notices that the shields are not active when he realizes birds are flying near

and landing on one still-living tripod, so he tells a soldier. The soldiers attack the tripod with Javelin missile launchers. The tripod topple to the ground, and blow up the blood-colored liquid and the alien invaders inside are found die. Ray finally brings Rachel to Mary Anne and Tim at Mary Anne's parent's house, where she has been waiting for them along with their son Robbie. Mary Ann tells Ray thank you while hugging Rachel, and she seems grateful to Ray for all he has done.

War of the Worlds invites controversy for society. It invites pro and contra about this film. Many people interest this movie because it was a very high quality movie with the best special effects. Kenneth Turan of the *Los Angeles Times* noted that “Spielberg may actually have done his job in *War of the Worlds* better than he realizes, showing how fragile the world is”. Besides that *Roger Ebert* noted that “the "retro design of the movie and considered that although the big budget, the alien invasion was "rudimentary" and "not very interesting". Michael Wilmington of the *Chicago Tribune* gave the film three and a half stars (out of four), and argued that “*War of the Worlds* definitely wins its battle, but not the war and also the film brought the audiences on a wild journey through two sides of Spielberg; the dark and the light, also stating the film was a core sentiment”.

Nevertheless, *War of the Worlds* invites some contra, one of them is noted by Dr. Criswell said “This is a very disappointing movie, and an immoral one. In one scene our “hero” murders an innocent man because he is afraid that the man (who is panicking) will give away their position. The movie is also very

violent, including a scene where the aliens spray out the human blood of their victims like rain. Language also abounds. Even these objections aside, the movie is dark, depressing, and violent. Even the ending loses the morality of the 50s classic (where they made it God who ultimately destroyed the creatures by a virus of sorts) (*War of the Worlds*, 2010).

Review aggregator website Metacritic gave it an average score of 73 out of 40 reviews. On another website, *Rotten Tomatoes*, *War of the Worlds* currently garners a 73% "fresh" rating based on 240 reviews. Among *Rotten Tomatoes*' Top Critics, which consists of popular and notable critics from the top newspapers, websites, television and radio programs, the film's reception was more ambivalent with 68% out of 41 reviews (*War of the Worlds*, 2010)

The market also shows the success of *War of the Worlds* as the movie of the year. The movie has grossed approximately US\$21 million worldwide, and earned the thirty-eight biggest opening week gross with grossing \$98,826,764 in 3908 theatres, averaging \$25,288 in each theater. Meanwhile on the biggest opening weekend, *War of the Worlds* grossed \$64,878,725 in 3908 theatres also, giving an average of \$16,601, also making it the fourth highest grossing film of 2005, and the fifty-first highest grossing film worldwide. *War of the Worlds* was also a box office success, being 2005's fourth most successful film both domestically, with \$234 million in North America, and worldwide, with \$591 million overall.

Movie industries welcome and give positive response to this movie, this is proved by the rating and the achievement which is got. During this film released, this film got nominations and awards. The nominations are nominated for 3 Oscars also another 12 wins & 19 nominations and awards. The nominations are nominated of *Oscar, Academy of Science Fiction, Fantasy & Horror Films, USA, Saturn Award, C.A.S. Award, Empire Award, Audience Award, MTV Movie Award, Golden Reel Award, Razzie Award, Satellite Award, Teen Choice Award, World Soundtrack Award*. *War of the Worlds* movie is the winner of *Saturn Award, BMI Film Music Award, Critics Choice Award, COFCA Award Empire Award, Golden Trailer, Sierra Award, Golden Reel Award, Best Single Visual Effect of the Year VES Award, World Soundtrack Award Best Original Soundtrack of the Year*. Those nominations and awards showed that this movie is great and as a box office movie.

War of the Worlds is the successful movie and interesting for many people. *War of the Worlds* movie has three appeals which make the researcher is interested in this movie. The first is the character of Ray Ferrier as the major character in this story, as the researcher explained before that Ray is a father who less close and doesn't care about the children, even Robbie only has a little amount of respect to his father. Then, because of a struggle to stay alive in a battle to defeat the tripods, Ray to be a responsible father who always cares the children and does anything to save them.

The theme is second appeal of this movie. At the beginning of the movie it brings the audience back to the biological nature of life so it was related to the

idea of human being as a biological being and the survivalism which nature plays an important role. As everybody knows that natural selection happens only when an individual or an organism has the most suitable appropriateness and beneficial characteristics that can stay alive and create the next generation, it can be said that nature has a crucial power to select its master to live in harmony.

The cinematography contributes the plus point to this movie, and it is the third appeal of this movie. Spielberg perfectly creates every scene appropriate to the situation of the real condition. This movie was supported by high technology in lighting, sounds, properties, dressing, and make up, these help Spielberg make this movie successfully. The lighting and the sounds shows the perfect imitation of every scene. It was added by the dressing and makes up which support the performances of the actors and actress become more maximum.

Search for meaning of existence become an issue chosen by the researcher in this movie. The searching for existence is actually one of man's efforts in building his meaning of life. Someone can find the meaning of life when he thinks that he manages to actualize his idealism. By actualizing his idealism, man can find his identity. In the scope of the society, then his existence will be built. The existence of a man can be seen from two sides. From the outside a man appears to be just another natural creature and from the inside he is an entire universe, the center of infinity. Man is equal, but existentially man has his own worlds, which differentiate him from other individual. It is understandable only in the term of individual's existence, his particular experience of life.

Thus, to understand a man, somebody cannot merely appreciate him from his physical appearance. A man is valuable if he has an existence rather than has being or essence. A man's experience of life is unique, radically different as of everyone else's and it can be understood truly in the terms of his involvement on life or commitment to it. It strenuously shuns that view, which assumes an ideal of man or mankind, a universal of human nature of which each man, is only one example.

All people will always face many choices in life, and will decide what they want to chose based on their belief in their experience. Ray as the one major character implies its phenomena, why the director chose Ray he is an ordinary American who still works for his daily needs. As a skilled American hero, his ability is better than common people. He is capable of making quick decision and responds immediately to the emergency situations. He qualifies as a hero since he shows American perseverance by showing high determination to shelter his children by destroying the threat. His ability to return the stability of Earth's community back to normal again makes him to be the defender of the society. Thus the researcher wants to study the existence of a man from the thought of existentialists.

According to those reasons, the researcher would like to explore analyze search for meaning in Steven Spielberg's *War Of The Worlds* movie based on the Existentialist Perspective, and the title is **SEARCH FOR MEANING OF EXISTENCE IN STEVEN SPIELBERG'S WAR OF THE WORLDS MOVIE (2005): AN EXISTENTIALIST PERSPECTIVE.**

B. Literature Review

There are two researchers who have conducted the study of *War of the Worlds* movie as an object of the research. The first is Arie Kurniawan (2007) entitled “Defense Mechanism of Ray Ferrier in Steven Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds* Movie: A Psychoanalytic Approach”. The object of the research paper is the film entitled *War of the Worlds*. This study belongs to qualitative study. The result of the study shows that some aspects of Individual Psychology influence Ray Ferrier’s defense to save his children in *War of The Worlds* and the theme of this film is the struggle for life in war of tripods which representative by one of American family, Ray Ferrier’s family. The defense mechanism is especially to save his children and generally to save the civilians.

The second is Nailul Lutfi Amalia (2007) entitled “The American Hero and the American Ideology of Survivalism in Steven Spielberg’s *War of the Worlds*: A Sociological Perspective”. This thesis comes to a conclusion of the presentation of the American hero. Ray Ferrier is an American hero by qualifications which constructs him to be a hero. He is an ordinary American who still works for his daily needs. As a skilled American hero, his ability is better than common people. He is capable of making quick decision and responds immediately to the emergency situations. He qualifies as a hero since he shows American urgency by showing high determination to protect his children by destroying the threat. His ability to return the stability of Earth’s community back to normal again makes him to be the defender of the society.

Although human has used his maximum effort and power of technology and science to destroy the alien's tripod, this strongest creature is defeated by the tiniest organism on Earth, the microorganism. The natural power shows that human beings are the most appropriate creature that can live harmoniously on the Earth.

The differences of this study and two previous studies are in the theme and the perspective. The writer uses existentialist perspective to analyze the data and using *War of the Worlds* movie (2005) as an object while the first study focused on how Ray Ferrier as the major character struggles to save his children in *War of the Worlds* movie and the theme of the movie is the struggle for life in war of tripods which representative by one of American family, Ray Ferrier's family. The defense mechanism is especially to save his children and generally to save the civilians and the second previous study focused on how does this movie present the American hero and how does the American hero in *War of The Worlds* affirm American Ideology of Survivalism. The hero in this movie affirms the ideology of survivalism by having an understanding that American beliefs and values are very important and necessary for survivalism. The research is a library research in the form of descriptive qualitative research. Semiotic Film Theory and Popular Culture Theory are employed to reveal the hidden meaning of signs in the movie. Meanwhile, sociological approach is also used because the making of the movie is closely related to the condition of American society recently. The different from the two previous studies, this

research focuses on Search for Meaning of Existence in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds Movie* (2005): An Existentialist Perspective.

C. Problem Statement

The problem of the study is how Ray Ferrier, the main character of Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* movie searches for meaning of existence.

D. Limitation of the Study

The researcher focuses this research in analyzing Ray's the meaning of existence in Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* movie based on Sartre's theory of existentialism.

E. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are mentioned follows:

1. To analyze Steven Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* movie based on the structural elements of the movie.
2. To describe the meaning of life in Spielberg's *War of the Worlds* movie based on an existentialist perspective.

F. The Benefits of the Study

The benefits of the study are:

1. Theoretical Benefit

The study is expected to give a new contribution and information to the larger body of knowledge, particularly the literary studies on *War of the Worlds* movie and novel.

2. Practical Benefit

The study is expected to enrich knowledge and experience of the researcher and another student of Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta or another university who have interest with literary study on the movie from Existentialist perspective.

G. Research Method

1. Type of the Study

The type of this research is descriptive qualitative. Descriptive qualitative is a type of research which result the descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from the observed object.

2. Type of Data and Data Source

a. Type of Data

The data of this study are image and text in *War of the Worlds* movie by Steven Spielberg.

b. Data Source

- 1) The primary data source is the film and script of *War of the Worlds* movie directed by Steven Spielberg which is related to the study.
- 2) The secondary data sources are the books and other sources that support the analysis.

3. Object of the Study

The object of this study is *War of the Worlds* directed by Spielberg and publishing by Paramount and DreamWorks Pictures in 2005. It is analyzed by using existentialist perspective.

4. Techniques of the Data Collection

The method of data collection in this study is note-taking and image-capturing. The researcher views the primary data repeatedly to reach more understanding of source. Next, the writer takes, compares, quotes, and studies others data into some categories and develops them into a good unity.

5. Techniques of Data Analysis

The technique of data analysis in this study is descriptive. It is concerns with the structural elements of the movie, researcher uses existentialist perspective, and draws conclusion.

H. Research Paper Organization

The researcher systematizes this research into five chapters. Chapter I is Introduction, which consist of background of the study, literary review, problem statement, limitation of the study, objective of the study, benefit of the study, theoretical approach, research method, and research paper organization. Chapter II comprises of the underlying theory, which presents The notion of Existentialism, Structural Elements of the Movie, Basic concepts of Sartre's Existentialism, and Theoretical Application. Chapter III deals with the structural analysis of the work, which consists of character and characterization, plot, point of view, setting, theme, and discussion. Chapter IV presents the Existentialism analysis. Chapter V presents Conclusion and Suggestion.