



## Existential Ecocriticism in *The Happening*: Environmental Ethics and the Limits of Anthropocentrism

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### Abstract

This article examines *The Happening* by M. Night Shyamalan through an existential ecocritical lens, relating human-centered assumptions to the portrayal of nature as neutral, indifferent, and impervious to straightforward causal explanation. It argues that the speculative narrative of ecological disruption through an airborne neurotoxin produced by plant life is, in fact, a complex philosophical exploration of the human condition, nature, and the crisis of anthropocentrism and ecocentrism. The study employs a qualitative methodological framework grounded in close textual and visual analysis of the film, drawing on existential philosophy and ecocritical theory to interpret key scenes, character dynamics, and narrative structures. It is an existential ecocritical study of how *The Happening* subverts the human worldview and how existential anxiety, freedom, and responsibility intersect with ecological concerns, alongside anthropocentrism, situating the film within current discourses of posthumanism, environmental ethics, and ecological consciousness. The findings reveal that the film reconfigures nature as an impersonal and ethically indifferent force that unsettles anthropocentric assumptions, foregrounds human epistemological limits, and intensifies existential responsibility within the context of environmental crisis.

Keywords: Existential Ecocriticism, Anthropocentrism, Ecological Crisis, Environmental Agency, Human Vulnerability, Absurdity, Ethics, Mortality

### Introduction

Environmental discourse often challenges anthropocentrism, the belief that humans come first in the natural world. Cultural works in literature and film have begun to challenge this notion by showcasing ecological crises, revealing human vulnerability, and exposing moral failures. *The Happening* (2008) resembles this discussion through picturing an unusual environmental activity in which plants release a kind of gas, airborne

neurotoxins, that diverts humans to act self-destructively. Although some have dismissed the story as unrealistic or sensational, its philosophical implications deserve thorough examination.

This article focuses on M. Night Shyamalan's *The Happening* through an existential ecocritical point of view, arguing that the film contrasts human-centered thinking by presenting nature as indifferent, neutral, and resistant to clear causal explanation.

"Ecocriticism examines human-nature relations in literature, expanding from American nature writing and British Romanticism to interdisciplinary and global approaches" (Bracke & Corporaal, 2010). However, this study looks at *The Happening* through the critical views of existential ecocriticism. This attempt intermingles existential philosophical emphasis on human freedom, mortality, and responsibility with ecocritical focus on the presentation of nonhuman entities. Instead of understanding the film as a tale of nature seeking revenge, this article argues that the film portrays nature as a neutral system governed by structural laws rather than moral perspectives. In doing so, the film shatters the comforting belief that ecological disasters are beyond human ethical standards. Existential ecocriticism seems to be less explored so far, yet it grows in relevance in the light of the ecological manifesto. If we critically examine the film's narrative succession, character reactions, and symbolic constituents, this article will indicate how *The Happening* finds an existential clash with ecological reality by urging humans to acknowledge their physical attributions in natural systems and the outcomes of their actions.

### **An Overview of the Screenplay**

*The Happening* opens a scary but general story about what might happen in the future if nature abruptly turns strange and minacious. The film, however, is set in places we all know well, like parks, schools, and busy city streets, where people usually feel safe walking through. Suddenly, without any pre-warning, people begin to act bizarrely. They become disordered, cannot think or act clearly, and sometimes jeopardize themselves. This is frightening because it occurs during normal daily life, showing how quickly safe places can turn vulnerable when nature behaves in a way humans cannot figure out.

The main character, Elliot Moore, is a school science teacher. He gradually notices that many people are exhibiting strange behavior in the same strange way. On the surrounding news, experts discuss a harmful thing in the air that attracts the brain. It makes people dizzy, puzzled, and can even cause death. While Elliot tries to understand what is going on, he also attempts to keep his students, friends, and himself safer. The fearsome effects in the story do not derive from fighting or weapons, but from something invisible in nature that no one can see or control physically.

Leaving the city does not end the problem. The horrible incidents chase people forward, even into small towns and the open countryside. Elliot, along with his group, cannot help but start thinking seriously about where to go and how to stay alive. As they travel, it becomes clear that nature is not just a background setting. It reacts to human actions and can strongly affect their lives. Empty roads, quiet houses, and wide-open fields make the world feel lonely and unsafe. The film entirely reminds us that humans are only a tiny part of a much bigger natural world, and that world does not always take care of human plans or safety.

However, the story increases fear and tension among human minds, although it holds important lessons. Elliot, indeed, relies on critical observation, logic, and cooperation in order to face the crisis. His scientific thoughts show that calm reasoning and good knowledge are essential in moments of danger. The story comes to an end without having any full certainty, reminding readers that nature remains powerful and mysterious, and that survival often depends on self-awareness, prime responsibility, and respect for the natural world.

### **Significance of the Study**

This study continues with existential ecocriticism, exposing a sustained philosophical interpretation of a contemporary cinematic text. While much ecocritical analysis focuses on overtly realist environmental narratives, this article, however, indicates that speculative cinema or screen play can function as a serious site of ecological philosophy. The analysis expands and extends the critical discussions of environmental connectedness by intensifying nature's neutrality, its moralization, and contesting over the interpretations to justify ecological thrashing.

The study also signifies environmental ethics, as it magnifies responsibility not as accountability imposed by nature but as an unconditional and unignorable situation of human freedom. By truly practicing existential philosophy with ecological criticism, this research, by and large, invites a theoretical approach to understanding ecological problems as ethical and ontological facings rather than merely scientific or political troubles.

### **Problem Statement**

Despite a growing interest in ecocritical study of cinema, *The Happening* has often been taken into note that it is philosophically vibrant, relating to existential ecocriticism. Existing critics frequently work on the film through a vivid outlook of environmental actions or ecological horrors, overlooking its deeper engagement with existential questions of meaning, responsibility, and human limitation. There is a lack of ongoing scholarly analysis that situates the film within existential ecocritical discourse, particularly on

anthropocentrism and environmental neutrality. This study marks this gap by making a comprehensive existential and ecocritical reading of the film.

### **Objectives of the Study**

This essay will offer a reading of *The Happening* using an existential ecocritical perspective in order to explore how the film undermines anthropocentric assumptions and reconceptualizes human–nature relations. It also aims to investigate the conversation between existential questions of absurdity, freedom, anxiety, and responsibility with ecological breakdown within the novel. It additionally seeks to illustrate how speculative film can contribute in a meaningful manner to environmental philosophy.

### **Research Questions**

- 1 How does *The Happening* challenge anthropocentric conceptions of human dominance over nature?
- 2 How does the movie indicate that nature does not care about right and wrong, instead of a power that punishes?
- 3 How do the existential themes of absurdity, responsibility, and vulnerability affect the human psyche?
- 4 What moral problems does the movie is portrayal of human survival and ecological agency?

### **Hypotheses**

This study says that *The Happening* criticizes anthropocentrism by showing that the ecological problem is caused by systemic imbalance instead of moral punishment. It also claims that the movie connects with existential philosophy since it talks about how nature is quiet, how individuals are responsible, and how there is no obvious meaning. The movie encourages viewers to see natural disasters not as signs that the world is ending, but as urgent reminders that humans need to rethink their ways of life, behaviors, and treatment of the natural world.

### **Literature Review**

This study depicts that *The Happening* lambasts anthropocentrism, showing that ecological troubles are caused by systemic imbalance instead of moral punishment. It also claims that the movie is a connection with existential philosophy since it talks about how nature is quiet, how individuals are responsible, and how there is no obvious meaning. It

also adds that the movie provides insight into how we think about natural disasters, making us see them as a wake-up call to life instead of a punishment for the end of the world.

Garrard (2004) discerns essential ecocritical categories such as wilderness, apocalypse, dwelling, and animals, creating a foundation for literary ecological analysis that has influenced posthumanism and global environmental studies. Carducci (2009, pp. 632–646) emphasizes that romantic literature fosters ecological ideologies through aesthetic representation, highlighting the influence of nature on moral cognition. Anyway, romantic literature during the Industrial Revolution illustrates the interplay between humans and their environment. They do this by emphasizing cultural and historical context instead of questions about existence (Davies, 2018, p. 12489). When we teach literature, we might also teach about the environment. In this manner, students can see how 18th-century writings represent nature and industrialization without having to ponder deep philosophical or existential concerns (Drew, 2013, pp. 301–310). Established motifs and trends within eighteenth-century literature reveal that, between the eighteenth century, human relationship to nature did exist, sharing eco-critical discourse language about caring for nature, yet paradoxically grounded in literary cultural studies rather than existential ethics (Drew & Sitter, 2011, pp. 227–239).

Literature evokes cultural anxieties about the environment, and through affective responses, readers can become aware of ethical responsibilities toward nature; this approach, explored under the concept of ecophobia, emphasizes psychological and socio-cultural dimensions rather than existential ones (Estok, 2013, p. 15). In postcolonial literature, Huggan and Tiffin (2015, pp. 1–294) clarify the unfair distribution of ecological responsibility in postcolonial literature. They focus on the moral and socio-political aspects of human-nature interactions, rather than existential philosophy. “Humans, animals, and the environment are signified across cultural borders through a lens of ethical consciousness and political responsibility, locating ecocritical issues within wider postcolonial paradigms” (O’Brien, 2009, p. 2). Among these, several works of Afrikaans literature reveal how landscapes and human-nature relations bring about cultural identity and moral sensibility. These are closer to situated ecological consciousness-raising than tackling closely philosophical or existential deliberations (Meyer 2021: 84–105); they address loss and land degradation.

So, previous research provides a rich base for thinking about human–nature relations and, literature and cultural studies. Experts like Garrard introduce critical terms, while romanticist, eighteenth-century, postcolonial, and regional studies serve as evidence for literature’s role in generating ethical recognition and emotional relationships that nurture environmental agency. This expression of concern has so far been dominated by the interest in written texts and concentrated on moral, cultural, or psychological concerns rather than on philosophical or existential ones. Even more importantly, the portrayal of nature in film, which relates to my research, especially when nature is portrayed as an

autonomous and dangerous being, is relatively uncharted territory.

So, it is our goal in this paper to help fill that gap by employing existential ecocriticism on *The Happening* to explore the way in which the film interrogates anthropocentric modes of thinking and exposes the extent of humanity's ability to control nature. In the process, it makes a unique and original contribution by incorporating existential thought into ecocritical screenplay analysis.

### **Research Methodology**

This study uses qualitative textual analysis. People analyze *The Happening* by examining its plot structure, character development, dialogue, and symbolic aspects. Existential ecocriticism is, indeed, the theoretical approach that simultaneously allows us to master these issues: human vulnerability, ecological agency, and supreme ethics.

The analysis reflects on key episodes in which self-centered assumptions collapse and, thereafter, existential anxiety arises, employing comparative reflection to uncover the recurring themes of neutrality, causality, and responsibility, while maintaining ethical standards through proper citation and integrity.

### **Scope, Focus, and Analytical Lens**

**Scope:** This study, in fact, focuses on *The Happening* (2008) and explains how the film opens up about ecological threats, human vulnerability, and ethical obligation. It rests on the narrative, the characters, and the symbolic structures around, with empirical data from the audience or comparative film analysis.

**Focus:** This research prioritizes human relationships with nature, anthropocentrism, existential helplessness, and moral responsibility; it clearly shows how environmental disruption shapes human meaning and decision-making processes.

**Analytical Framework:** This study adopts an existential ecocritical perspective incorporating the concepts from existential philosophy on the one hand (human freedom, death, the absurd, and moral responsibility) and concepts from ecocriticism on the other (inhuman power, ecological representation, and environmental ethics).

### **Existential Ecocritical Analysis of *The Happening***

The scene before Central Park shatters people's traditional confidence that they can find a human explanation for every event (such as mass suicide), be it terrorism or chemical warfare. The inability to imagine the power or influence that nature may have on its own is a great limitation of humans. This section shows how fragile human dominance really is and how quickly the illusion of control can fade away.

Here, the lives of the protagonist Elliot Moore and his companions are plunged into extreme uncertainty when their technology and language become useless for the time being. However, their journey is much like Albert Camus's philosophy of the Absurd, where people are confronted with an irrational and meaningless world. Julian's suicide, in fact, is a prime example of how people's long-cherished confidence crumbles in the face of this indifference to nature.

The nursery owner's idea - that the plants have adopted a counter-strategy to protect themselves - revolutionizes the idea of human superiority. This is a moment of a significant philosophical change. It is understood here that human survival no longer depends on controlling nature, but on our humility and environmental awareness.

Furthermore, the surviving characters and Mrs. Jones show how the human moral structure collapses in the face of an existential crisis. Then, the final scene shows Elliot and Alma surviving not by fighting nature, but by embracing it wholeheartedly. Through this, the film conveys the message that only when we wisely respond to nature's call, rather than trying to control or escape from it, can we survive.

The film's finale hints that the environmental crisis is not confined to any specific borders; it is a global problem. It crosses political or moral boundaries to a point where there is no longer any chance of preventing the disaster through any traditional means.

### **Discussion** **Ecological Crisis as an Existential Condition**

The text in question is fertile ground for existential ecocritical inquiry, as it connects ecological upheaval to questions of human death, freedom, ethical responsibility, and the limits of rational mastery. Swain (2024) refers to Rose, who states that despite human beings being thrown into the world, having no essence and as uncertain, being is defined in terms of relations with other sentient beings, not solitude (pp. 188–193). The tale continually disassembles anthropocentric presumptions, as a world in which nonhuman powers have agency without reasoning, intention, or moral valence unfolds. It is not human beings who are the masters of nature, but rather frail, dependent members of an ecology which functions beyond their ken. Within this framework, environmental crisis is not so much a condition in the back but an existential one that alters human meaning, action, and way of judgment.

#### **Central Park and the Breakdown of Anthropocentric Certainty**

Those early events in Central Park were a severe blow to our traditional 'anthropocentric ego' or anthropocentric confidence. When people started committing suicide in droves for no apparent reason, our rational world collapsed like a house of cards.

Everyone, from the state to ordinary people, tried to explain this terrible reality by casting it into their familiar mold (such as terrorism, chemical warfare, or technological failure). This tendency actually reveals the shortcomings of our imagination, where we are deliberately afraid to accept the independent power of any entity outside of humans or nature (nonhuman agency). This reflex reveals a deeply ingrained belief that all threats must originate from human intention. “Classical phenomenology and existentialism are anthropocentric, neglecting non-human agency; ecophenomenology broadens the focus to relational, ecological experience” (Payne, p. 130). But similar ways of understanding do not work when the phenomena extend to cities other than New York. People stop believing they are in command, and at the same time, everyone feels weak. From an existential perspective, this event underscores the essence of contingency and the inevitability of mortality. People do not die because they did anything bad or made a choice; they die because of natural processes that happen without any meaning to people. Death is abruptness exacerbates existential distress, highlighting the vulnerability of anthropocentric perspectives within indifferent natural systems.

### **Elliot Moore and the Encounter with Absurdity**

Kurtz asserts that *The Happening* attacks modernity by demonstrating the futility of relying on science to control nature, as the film deconstructs its narrative and utilizes scientific vocabulary more for comfort than for authentic clarification. Elliot Moore and his pals’ existential vulnerability gets worse when they try to escape Philadelphia by train. When communication networks, transportation systems, and technology infrastructures break down, the logical mechanisms that usually keep things in order and predictable also break down. The video depicts how terrible things like terrorism, suicide, natural catastrophes, and being forced to leave your home can be, as well as blatantly stupid things. For instance, “Elliot (Wahlberg) recites the steps of the scientific method amid crisis, emphasizing the futility of applying reason to an incomprehensible situation” (2020). According to existential philosophy, these are moments of confronting the absurd: situations when human beings meet a world that signifies neither explanation nor moral consistency (Camus, 1991, p. 1). This obsequious inability of the characters is not just a temporary situation, but rather a manifestation of a deeper ontological crisis. Their so-called autonomy or self-control is now weakened and shattered under the weight of environmental catastrophe. Lost aimlessly in an illusory environment and paralyzed by the lack of reliable direction, it confronts us with a fundamental truth. It proves that human reason, out of harmony with nature, is ultimately inadequate. The pride of modern civilization’s ‘mastery’ or control, which we cherish, does not take long to collapse like a house poorly made in the sand, when nature turns against it.

### **Julian is Suicidal and the Limits of Human Freedom**

In *The Happening*, pollution is seen as an invisible toxic chemical in the atmosphere that drives urban dwellers to commit mass suicide. This death march is not just a loss of life, but also demonstrates how quickly human logic and judgment can be paralyzed when faced with an uncontrollable environmental crisis (Shafiee, 2020, p. 2). Julian's character is a tragic example of this mental and moral decline. His desperate attempt to reach his waiting wife in Princeton was a primal and genuine human desire. But as an invisible death trap begins to thicken in the air around us, an indescribable horror dawns on all of us. Ultimately, Julian's chosen path to suicide symbolizes a profound moral and existential defeat. It is not just a lack of courage; Rather, it is the harsh realization that even the strong will of man is not an isolated island from the larger natural boundaries of this planet.

Seen in the light of Existential Ecocriticism, Julian's tragic end is actually a symbolic death of Anthropocentric Pride. Man's pride was that his willpower could conquer all the limitations of nature, but that belief is shattered here. His extreme decision clearly shows that man's so-called 'freedom' is not an absolute entity. Every choice and existence of man is always deeply entangled in the web of nature's physical boundaries and surroundings.

### **The Nurseryman and the Emergence of Nonhuman Agency**

A turning point in the film's philosophy comes through the nursery owner's statement. His observation that plants have evolved an automatic 'defense mechanism' against overpopulation revolutionizes our conventional understanding of nature. For a long time, we have seen nature as a passive, inert object for human use, but here, nature is no longer just a silent backdrop; it is an active agent, capable of controlling human behavior and existence.

This view is largely consistent with post-humanist environmentalism. This philosophy advocates that the Earth or the universe is not solely in the hands of humans, but is part of a vast ecological network in which each element has its own influence or 'agency'. Here, nature has no moral sense of its own, no vindictiveness or desire for evil; it simply responds mechanically. This dispassionate response confronts us with a stark existential experience - one that shows us that the vast work of the universe is capable of moving at its own pace, regardless of human means or human suffering or feelings.

### **Survival Ethics and the Fragmentation of Social Morality**

A radical shift in the film's philosophy comes through the nursery owner's

statement. His observation that plants have developed an automatic ‘defense mechanism’ against the growing population revamps our traditional understanding of nature. For a long time, we have seen nature as a docile and inert object of human possession. But here, nature is no longer just a silent backdrop; rather, it is an active power, capable of directly controlling human behavior and existence.

As the situation becomes more dire, the survivors’ decision to break up into small groups gives rise to a new moral perspective. It is no longer a struggle for dominance over nature, but a kind of ecological cognizance. This evolution marks the transition from a controlled mentality to a coexistence mentality, through which it is acknowledged that human survival now depends entirely on their behavior and maintaining harmony with nature.

However, in the midst of this crisis, the killings of Josh and Jared by armed civilians demonstrate how quickly social and moral structures can collapse in the face of extreme environmental pressures. Primitive fear poisons human relationships, leading to extreme distrust and hostility. However, existential ecocriticism explains this moral collapse as follows: in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, human moral decision-making does not stop, although it becomes extremely fragile and temporary. Valero Garces (2017) has pointed out that the process of translating landscape and retrieving its meaning in different cultural contexts is linked to deep existential concerns of humans (p. 261).

### **Mrs. Jones and the Isolation of Individual Existence**

Our encounter with Mrs. Jones in the midst of this natural cataclysm reveals a harsh reality: how lonely and isolated a human being can be in this vast world. Her intense fear and eventual withdrawal from society are the outcome of a devastating conflict within the human psyche as well as a hostile environment. Her sudden death establishes the harsh truth that nature does not conform to our personal ideals, plans, or emotional worlds; it follows its own rules.

When Eliot realizes that this toxic chemical is not only harming the individual but also the collective unity, a radical change occurs in his philosophy of life. He realizes that this vulnerability is no longer just a collective issue; it is a deeply personal crisis for each person. The survival of the body in this adversity is not possible through mechanical control alone, but rather through the acceptance of this rude form of nature and the warmth of mutual human relationships. This fragile form of survival teaches us that, in times of extreme danger, not technological superiority but selfless human connection is man’s last refuge.

### Aftermath, Continuity, and Planetary Vulnerability

The film's ultimate scene, which takes place three months after the main event, stimulates our traditional notion of a happy ending or the conclusion of a story. The struggle of Eliot and Alma, to adapt to their new lives with Jess, is not a final triumph but a sign of a constant journey of life. Alma's pregnancy here does not symbolize a dramatic revival but a silent determination to survive in the face of extreme uncertainty. At the same time, the repetition of similar environmental disasters in other parts of the world breaks down our misconception that natural disasters are only a problem of a specific region. It seems to prove that environmental breakings do not show respect for geographical or national boundaries; they bring forth global crises carrying messages of immense risks and collective responsibilities for all of humanity.

When Eliot realizes that this invisible, toxic breath is destroying not only the individual but also the collective unity of humanity, his outlook on life changes radically. He understands that this helplessness is no longer just a collective statistic; it is a deeply personal and existential crisis for every human being. Surviving this adversity is only possible through acceptance of this harsh and cruel form of nature and the warmth of mutual human relationships. This fragile form of survival teaches us that in the day of extreme catastrophe, not technological excellence, but selfless human connection is the last and only refuge of man.

### Existential Ecocritical Synthesis

Scanning the narrative through the game of existential ecocriticism thus reveals its ultimate allegiance to the breakdown of anthropocentrism, push for nonhuman geneticization, and negotiation of death, absurdity, and ethical humility. The environmental crisis appears not as punishment or revenge but as the structure of human life in a complicated ecosystem. "Kramshøj Flinker (2021) therefore posits that the existential emotions arising from climate fiction can prompt a common ethical reflection on choice and responsibility, within the negative narrative of an ecocatastrophe" (p. 167). It is a story that calls for a reorientation from domination and control to planetary ethical concern, where human beings come to see themselves as one vulnerable part of an indifferent but interconnected world.

### Findings

The central argument of the debate on anthropocentrism in environmental ethics is that if nature is reduced to a mere material resource to fulfill human needs, it will not ensure the long-term protection of the environment. However, *The Happening* completely

reverses this traditional notion. In this film, it is not the human task to protect nature, but nature itself takes a very proactive role in protecting itself from human destructive actions. This representation exceeds the boundaries of anthropocentrism and presents a very strong argument in favor of morality. This portrayal goes beyond anthropocentrism and makes a strong case for a broader morality. Here, the scope of morality is not limited to humans but extends to nonhuman and natural elements (nonhuman agency), where each ecosystem is judged on its own inherent value. Whereas common environmental ethical theories emphasize conscious and responsible changes in human behavior, *The Happening* highlights a different and cruel reality, where nature imposes an unintended but violent reevaluation on humans in order to preserve its existence.

Nature is depicted as either silent scenery or as an invincible power that strikes back at human beings, as opposed to a morally undetermined system that human beings can never hope to comprehend or dominate. This subversion of anthropocentrism, which is the idea that human beings are uniquely important and almighty in the world, is way more relevant. As human beings die in droves and technology ceases to function, fear, disorientation, and recognition of their own mortality give rise to basic human questions about existence, such as doubt, mortality, and freedom.

Indeed, there is no visible negative force or supernatural cause behind this cosmic crisis; rather, human control has ended. In fact, no negative force or mysterious power manufacturing the fates of this cosmic conspiracy is seen at all; human agency simply withers. The survival of man is now being determined not by itself, but by how well it can reconcile the hard conditions imposed on it by nature and maintain that reconciliation in perpetuity. This story will teach us that there is no vanishing of moral responsibility in the face of an emergency, but instead that this becomes more brittle, more fragile, and less achievable. In *The Happening*, it is clear that we are not the masters of nature, but merely passersby who happen to be sharing this space with our local surroundings.

This narrative shows us that moral responsibility does not disappear in times of emergency, but rather becomes more fragile and more difficult to sustain. *The Happening* clearly demonstrates that humans do not dominate nature, but are merely fellow travelers with the local environment. It exposes the limitations of our traditional 'anthropocentric' thinking and portrays environmental catastrophe as an existential force that forces us to learn that we must humbly coexist with other species on this planet called Earth.

When Eliot realizes that this invisible, poisonous breath is destroying not only the individual but also the collective solidarity of humanity, a revolutionary change occurs in his philosophy of life. He understands that this helplessness is no longer just a newspaper statistic; it is an extremely personal and existential crisis for every human being. The survival of the body in these hostile times is not possible through any mechanical technique or modern technology; rather, it is possible through the heartfelt acceptance of this harsh form of nature and the warmth of mutual human relationships. This highly sensitive form

of survival confronts us with the ultimate truth that in the days of extreme disaster, not technological superiority, but selfless human connection is the last and only absolute shelter of man.

### **Implications of the Study**

The importance and relevance of this research are not limited to the realm of literature and film studies. Still, they extend to the broader field of environmental ethics and sciences related to them. This work intensifies that existential ecocriticism is a powerful theoretical approach enough to deeply analyze fictional narratives. It challenges the traditional ways of thinking to simplify environmental catastrophes as mere 'divine punishment' or supernatural causes. Rather, it opens up a new horizon of seeing the disasters as complex interactions between human existential crises and nature's own sovereignty. The results favor a transition from anthropocentric bioethics to a more relational and responsibility-centered ecological logic.

### **Future Research Directions**

Future research projects could employ existential ecocriticism to other speculative or post-apocalyptic films in order to examine how ecological anxiety is depicted in cross-cultural contexts. Comparative research on the representation of environmental responsibility in cinematic versus literary texts could also provide interesting insights. Further, interdisciplinary work that bridges the environmental sciences and philosophy might help to advance our knowledge of the narrative depiction of ecological networks.

### **Limitations of the Study**

One study limitation is its single-film focus (*The Happening*), which limits generalization. This is a completely qualitative and theoretical analysis, grounded in an existential ecocritical approach rather than in data or reception studies. Further, other important theoretical frameworks and the technical elements of film are not discussed, which might have presented different readings of the ecological content. Thus, in addition to the political summaries listed at the end, such as extractives.

### **Conclusion**

To sum up, *The Happening* is an ecocritical existential story that, at a base level of questioning, undercuts all anthropocentric assumptions by placing humans in and not above or superior to ecological systems. The devastation that erupts on screen arises not

from moral intent, explanation, or human action but instead illustrates the frailty of scientific rationality, technological command, and the constructed meanings. Nature appears as amoral, mechanical wheels indifferent to human values, undercutting traditional stories of natural revenge. This makes us doubt our existence and reveals how little we can control the natural world.

The characters' reactions to the environmental problem are based on how they feel about how weak people are, how foolish life is, and how moral obligation is in a world where nature does not obey the norms of people. People must deal with the uncertainty of their lives when societal order, personal freedom, and established standards break down. While reminding that the duty to act is still present, despite a useful incapacity. Survival is not a matter of trying to dominate or control nature, but of being humble and cooperative with it, respecting that nonhuman forces have their laws and a will of their own. Finally, *The Happening* depicts an environmental crisis as the nature of human existence: even when we feel life has no meaning to it anymore, the fact remains invariant: there is no way out – responsibility is still here. After carefully watching the film, wearing the sensual existential and ecocritical spectacles, it is obvious that this study questions the idea of humans fully controlling the world, encourages ethical thinking about humanity's relationship with nature, and highlights human vulnerability in an interconnected global context.

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