Introduction

The War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells

“No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man’s....”

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*Note: Unless otherwise noted, all citations come from H.G. Wells’ The War of the Worlds

Topics for Discussion

1. (D)Evolution

H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* is intensely concerned with evolutionary success and explores what this means in various ways. Wells’ narrator offers a lengthy commentary on the anatomical evolution of the Martians and compares it with that of human beings (see pages 144-47 in the Broadview edition). His conclusion subscribes to the opinion that our human anatomy is superfluous and suggests that we could be in transition towards being similar to the Martians. At the same time, the narrator talks about humanity’s evolutionary success in fighting off the bacteria that eradicates the Martian invaders. What is Wells saying about the evolutionary progress of humankind? Are we progressing, as the narrator implies when he says that “man has bought his birthright on the earth;” or is humankind fully of anatomical dead ends, still inefficient and in need of evolutionary measures?

2. The Two-Mouthed Storyteller

H.G. Wells uses a number of narration methods in his *The War of the Worlds* that sets it apart from other novels. The book utilizes a retrospective first-person narrator to tell the story. He represents most of the common characteristics of first-person narrators: he provides commentary, infuses his storytelling with the subjective lens of a character (see section 2 of the Form and Content panel), and focuses on the events related to his own experiences. This last point does not hold completely true throughout the novel. While the narrator largely focuses on his experiences, he shifts to a detailed account of his brother’s experiences during the Martian attack in London (chapters 14, 16, and 17 in book I). The exactness of the account leaves no argument for the brother having communicated the story. In describing his brother’s escape from London, the narrator writes: “In one cart stood a blind man in the uniform of the Salvation Army, gesticulating with his crooked fingers and bawling, ‘Eternity! Eternity!’ His voice was hoarse and very loud so that my brother could hear him long after he was lost to sight” (121). Every page of the brother’s story is as detailed as the one given here, and it seems to give the narrator near-omnipotent power as a storyteller. What is Wells doing by splitting his story as such, and in such detail as he executes it?

3. Colonialism

*The War of the Worlds* can be seen as a direct representation of colonialism. Just as imperialism was the overtaking of colonies by the Europeans, this fiction story brings up the concern of Europe being overtaken by an even more superior being than men. Colonialism was driven by the belief that European men were superior to the men of other lands and that those men were not biologically and morally equal. The Martians’ invasion of Earth can be seen as equivalent to the colonial mindset. There were no remorseful feelings for the lives of the people invaded just as the Martians had no feelings of remorse for the humans they were invading. Colonialism was believed as morally right and the Martians’ invasion is ingrained with the same beliefs. Why would Wells decide to write a book with this parallel and directly recognize it in his book? What does this parallel suggest about imperialism?

Form is Content

1. The narrator contemplates the stillness around him:

“The fear I felt was no rational fear, but a panic terror not only of the Martians, but of the dusk and stillness all about me” (59).

Many times throughout the novel the narrator comments on the terror of silence, and at times, as in the passage above, the fear brought about by silence is equal to the fear of Martian attacks. Stillness denotes the absence of human life and is by proxy symbolic of Martian victory and the fall of mankind. The fear of silence is somewhat ironic, as the narrator, and Wells himself, have chosen a quiet countryside town like Woking to inhabit. The fear derives from the excess of silence, which signifies an unnatural discrepancy leaning toward seclusion in the balance between isolated peace and chaotic society.

2. The narrator observes the wreckage of the invasion through his study window:

“With a queer feeling of impersonal interest I turned my desk-chair to the window, sat down, and stared at the blackened country, and particularly at the three gigantic black things that were going to and fro in the glare about the sand-pits” (80).

It quickly becomes evident that Wells’ *The War of the Worlds* is not a novel concerned with character development or character relationships. The book consists of the thoughts and experiences (perhaps an even split between the two) of the unnamed narrator. The narrator presents himself as a scientifically minded person (see the Characters section of this Wiki), who takes it upon himself to observe and relay information regarding the Martian invasion. The passage above demonstrates very distinctly the narrator’s role in the novel. He sits at his study window and surveys the results of the Martian invasion after the tripods had swept through Woking.
While the narrator feels invested in his survival, he conveys an air of scientific detachment (see the narrator’s quotation in the Characters section of this Wiki) and curiosity. The narrator understands this role, which he has created for himself, throughout the book; and at times he breaks the forth wall in order to align the facts of the matter. Keeping in line with his persona, the narrator finds it crucial to inform the reader about misguided information on the Martians that surfaced during the attacks. He explains that, “the pamphlet containing these [inaccurate] renderings [of the tripods] had a considerable vogue, and I mention them here simply to warn the reader against the impression they may have created” (143). Here, the narrator not only informs the reader, but he also breaks the fourth wall to inform that reader that he is informing them.

The original cover of the 1898 edition of The War of the Worlds. (Source: Wiki Commons)

3. The narrator reflects on the Martians’ death:

“But there are no bacteria in Mars, and directly these invaders arrived, directly they drank and fed, our microscopic allies began to work their overthrow. Already when I watched them they were irrevocably doomed, dying and rotting even as they went to and fro. It was inevitable. By the toll of a billion deaths man has bought his birthright of the earth, and it is his against all comers; it would still be his were the Martians ten times as mighty as they are” (181-2).

This passage blends a number of topics central to the novel, among them ideas of evolutionary permanence and imperialism.

The narrator highlights the evolutionary stability of the human species here, while in other parts of the book he criticizes the superfluity of the human anatomy (see pages 144-47 of the Broadview edition). The narrator seems to assert that humanity, though biologically flawed, is superior to Martians, if only because humans are impervious to the bacteria that killed off the Martians. It follows the evolutionary notion that it is the best adapted, and not the strongest, species that will survive.

But how might readers interpret the victory of one empire (humanity, specifically the British people) over another empire (Martians)? It is true to some degree that in the scope of the novel, the roles have changed, placing the British Empire in the position of the colonized. However, one could well argue that this passage instantly returns the power to the British, practically through default of evolutionary endurance. The majority of the book challenges the idea of the British Empire as the highest power by subjecting them to the same violence they inflicted on others. Yet the end of the book reasserts the power of the British, and perhaps even enhances it through the phrase, “it [the right to live] would still be his were the Martians ten times as mighty as they are” (182).

4. The narrator questions the Martians’ intentions and gives them credit as he compares it to the European invasion of empire:

“And before we judge them too harshly we must remember what ruthless and utter destruction our own species has wrought, not only upon the animals, such as the vanished bison and the dodo, but upon its own inferior races. The Tasmanians, in spite of their human likeness, were entirely swept out of existence in a war of extermination waged by European immigrants, in the space of fifty years. Are we such apostles of mercy as to complain if the Martians warred in the same spirit?” (43)
The narrator is blatantly comparing the Martians invading Earth to the European invasions of other civilizations. The narrator is asking how man can begrudge the Martians when man himself has invaded other men. A mindset of European superiority has dominated the Earth for years so man should understand and be able to appreciate the Martians’ mindset of a right to invade due to superiority.

5. The narrator uses the ideas of evolution to justify and explain the Martians’ invasion:

“And we men, the creatures who inhabit this earth, must be to them at least as alien and lowly as are the monkeys and lemurs to us. The intellectual side of man admits that life is an incessant struggle for existence, and it would seem that this too is the belief of the minds upon Mars. Their world is far gone in its cooling and this world is still crowded with life, but crowded only with what they regard as inferior animals” (42, 43).

The narrator is explaining that men compared to Martians are like comparing men to monkeys. This idea brings in the question if men really are the most intelligent and advanced creatures. Human kind is believed to be the most superior creature and the Martians bring a threat to their physical existence but more importantly their unsurpassed moral existence. The existence of Martians determines that men are not the most intelligent creatures and they too are able to be extinct at the mercy of another creature.
The Father of Science Fiction

H.G. Wells is known by many as one of the first science fiction writers. His first novel, The Time Machine (1895) is noted as one of the earliest novels involving time travel and along with Jules Verne, Wells has been called “The Father of Science Fiction” by literary critics, specifically Royce Radcliffe (Radcliffe, 2007). His popularity among readers was gradual, and the fascination to which The War of the Worlds was received helped him rise into prominence.

The War of the Worlds was one of the very first novels written about extra terrestrial life and was the template for numerous novels to come in the 20th and 21st centuries. Wells is distinguished from other science fiction writers as he was the first writer to make science oriented critiques of society. According to Royce Radcliffe, Verne used the genre more as a way to make science “romantic and positive” while Wells did exactly the opposite, making pessimistic jabs on mankind (Radcliffe, 2007). War of the Worlds reflects fears of Europe’s balance of power and was received as a novel “way ahead of its time” (Radcliffe, 2007).

**SPOILER:** The War of the Worlds is also known to employ a plot device, common in the science fiction genre. *Deus Ex Machina* is Latin for “God out of the machine” and is defined as “a seemingly inextricable problem that is suddenly and abruptly solved with the contrived and unexpected intervention of some new event, character, ability or object.”

When all of England is being destroyed by ruthless creatures from outer space, it seems absolutely impossible to ever return to the same Earth. Their technology is more advanced as they can wipe out humanity with a single blast of their heat rays and transportation is quite easy as they are built into towering tripods. Humanity seems to be completely hopeless, when suddenly “And, scattered about it, some in their overturned war-machines, some in the now rigid Handling Machines, and a dozen of them stark and silent and laid in a row, were the Martians-dead!—slain by the putrefactive and disease bacteria against which their systems were unprepared; slain as the Red Weed was being slain; slain, after all man’s devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in His wisdom, has put upon this Earth” (Wells, 181).

Seemingly out of nowhere, the blood thirsty Martians contract disease, as they lack immunity to earthly bacteria. This ending is abruptly solved by unexpected circumstances, a frequent way to end a science fiction novel.

Royce Radcliffe sums up Wells behavior towards science and the science fiction genre best by saying “in The War of the Worlds, [Wells] seems to imply our technology will destroy us. Before it was even thought of, he predicted the splitting of the atom. When this happened he was horrified... he encouraged governments not to pursue the technology but they did anyway and he died a bitter man” (Radcliffe, 2007).

### Film

Multiple film adaptations of “The War of The Worlds” have been made including sequels. The most well-known of these adaptations were released in 1953 and 2005 and diverge from the novel’s storyline while reflecting their respective time periods.
Henrique Alvim Corrêa’s depiction of the tripods from _The War of the Worlds_ (Source: Wiki Commons)


The 1953 film adaptation of “The War of The Worlds” is set in Southern California and includes a much larger emphasis on narrative and characters than the novel.

**Trailer**

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_fSawuo2Rg&feature=fvst

**Synopsis**

The film opens with a nameless narrator describing the solar system and the need of Martians to find a new home, quoting near directly from the opening of the novel. After this introduction, the film moves to Dr. Clayton Forrester, a scientist of no specific field, who is on a fishing trip with colleagues in Southern California when what is assumed to be a meteor falls. He travels to the site where he speculates with authorities and meets Sylvia Van Buren. Determined to investigate once the ‘meteor’ has cooled, Forrester goes into town with Sylvia and attends a square dance. Three deputies remain at the site to keep guard and protect civilians, and witness the opening of the cylinder. They attempt to welcome the travelers but are vaporized instead.

At the square dance, the power suddenly shuts off, a man shouts that the phones are down as well, and soon many notice that their watches have stopped. Dr. Forrester realizes an Electro Magnetic Pulse (EMP) has occurred and rushes back to the site of the ‘meteor.’ Seeing the remnants of the vaporized men, and another cylinder falling nearby, the police call in the military and battle begins. There is word that others cylinders have fallen around the world, and that the Martians seem to be working with a coordinated plan. After various failed military attempts, Forrester notes that “If they’re mortal they must have mortal weaknesses.”

Soon, Sylvia and Forrester find themselves trapped in a house in a scene reminiscent of that in the novel when the narrator and his companion, the curate, are confined to the kitchen and scullery of a house crushed by an adjacent cylinder. This is the only scene in the film providing a full view of a Martian being, a bipedal creature with a giant, tri-color eye within its chest. After Sylvia and Forrester escape, Military personnel state they have learned the cylinders are joining together in groups of three, and that there are plans to use an atomic weapon “ten times stronger than anything ever used before” against them. However, this bomb proves ineffective, causing Major General Mann to exclaim, “guns, tanks, bombs, they’re like toys against them!” Scientists calculate that the Martians will conquer the earth within six days, and begin to consider biological warfare. Authorities attempt to evacuate cities, and as the team of scientists attempts to relocate to a lab in the Rocky Mountains, they encounter mobs and lose their vehicles.
Stranded, Forrester begins to search for Sylvia, whom he fears has met a similar fate. While searching for her, Forrester runs into several of his colleagues who have taken refuge in a church, and soon discovers Sylvia. As the sounds of the Martians grow louder and nearer, the two embrace until the noise suddenly ceases. A crowd rushes outside to see the Martian ship has crashed into a building, and a port at the bottom opens. An arm-like appendage slowly reaches out, then stops and turns from the healthy shade of brown to a sickly green. Forrester searches for a pulse and pronounces it dead, blaming a lack of immunity to earthly germs for its death. The rest of the Martians meet a similar fate, and the unnamed narrator returns, reciting nearly verbatim several lines from the final chapter of the novel.

Similarities to Novel

Many parallels can be drawn between the novel and this adaptation. While the diary format has been abandoned, a narrator frames the film with adapted quotes, explaining reasoning and logic of the plot to the viewer just as the novel’s narrator does to his imagined audience.

“No one would have believed in the middle of the twentieth century that human affairs were being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man’s. Yet, across the gulf of space on the planet Mars, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic regarded our Earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely joined their plans against us. Mars is more than 140 million miles from the sun, and for centuries has been in the last status of exhaustion. At night, temperatures drop far below zero even at its equator. Inhabitants of this dying planet looked across space with instruments and intelligences that which we have scarcely dreamed, searching for another world to which they could migrate.” --“The War of The Worlds” (1953)

“...No one would have believed in the last years of the nineteenth century that this world was being watched keenly and closely by intelligences greater than man’s....Yet across the gulf of space, minds that are to our minds as ours are to those beasts that perish, intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic, regarded this earth with envious eyes, and slowly and surely drew there plans against us.... The planet Mars, I scarcely need remind the reader, revolves about the sun at a mean distance of 140,000,000 miles, and the light and heat it receives form the sun is barely half of that received by this world....And looking across space with instruments, and intelligences such as we have scarcely dreamed of, they see, at its nearest distance only 35,000,000 of miles sunward of them a morning star of hope.” (41)

The film’s close also features a narrator reciting lines adapted form the novel.

Another relic of the diary format is a voiceover which is revealed to be the voice of a newscaster, who proceeds to state that all radio signals are down as a result of the Martian invasion, “which means these tape recordings I’m making are for the sake of future history...if any.” As well, the Martians’ technology remains largely unchanged, as they still utilize a ‘Heat-Ray,’ depicted as a stream of red sparks, to burn their surroundings. The Martians also travel on earth in ships reminiscent of tripods, which are supported by “invisible legs.”

Further, many scenes in the film parallel those of the novel. Sylvia and Dr. Forrester become trapped, briefly, in a house surrounded by Martian ships, in an abbreviated version of the two weeks the novel’s narrator spends trapped with the unstable Curate in the kitchen of a house that was largely crushed by the crash of a cylinder, and that is now a base of the Martians. In both of these scenes, a tentacle reaches into the room and explores, though in the film it seems to be a machine rather than an appendage.

Significant Differences from Novel

While less evident than the changes of time period and location, many smaller changes impact this film. Absent from this film are the Martian’s “Black Smoke” used in the novel to smoke out humans and the “Red Weed” which invades the landscape of the novel, and that’s wilting foreshadows the Martians’ eventual defeat.

Other changes result from the era in which this film was made. As the first cylinder begins to open, one of the deputies charged with guarding it shouts “its an enemy sneak attack!” The post-World War II mentality is also reflected by less sensitivity to violence and mass death, as well as through cooperation between nations to form an allegiance against the common enemy of the Martians rather than an ‘every man for himself’ mentality.

Finally, technology plays a key role in separating this film from the novel. Faster transportation allows the military to reach the cylinder sites quickly, and advanced science equipment leads to more information about the Martians physically.

This adaptation moves the setting to the Eastern Seaboard of the United States and follows a new cast of characters.

Trailer

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MJYnHA2OzfA

Synopsis

Ray Ferrier arrives home from work to his pregnant ex-wife and her new husband waiting to drop off the children, Robby and Rachel. On television are news reports detailing storms, earthquakes, and Electro Magnetic Pulses (EMPs) in the Ukraine. A few hours later, a large storm is visible in the sky, lightning begins to strike down, and Ray and Rachel rush inside while Robby is still out. Huge bolts of lightning strike the same spot twenty-six times, and once it ceases Ray hurries to locate his son.

At the site of the lightning strike is a huge crack that rapidly begins to spread as the ground shakes, causing buildings to collapse. Mechanical arms spring out of the ground and the body of a tripod rises up and begins to cause havoc, using a heat-ray to vaporize people and buildings. Ray runs towards home and finds his son outside the house, confused. He begins to collect supplies in a hurry, refusing to tell his children what is happening for fear of scaring them. They find a rare working car and head towards his ex-wife’s home, which they find empty. They spend the night and awake to bright flashes and strange sounds. Ray goes outside, sees a plane has crashed in the street, and speaks to members of a news crew who inform him that there are ships (tripods) in cities around the world and that these are protected by invincible shields. The news producer shows Ray footage and explains that the machines seem to have been buried underground, and that the aliens rode down the lightning in capsules.
Ray and his children set out on the road again, this time heading to Boston, where the children's mother and her new husband are visiting her parents. Along the way they are carjacked and proceed on foot with thousands of others, and soon three tripods emerge. As people flee, Robby attempts to run off in the direction that military vehicles are headed, and despite Ray's efforts he escapes and runs off. Ray and Rachel find refuge in a basement with a man named Ogilvy, but soon the aliens approach the house in a scene parallel to the novel. After a time Ogilvy appears less and less sensible, filling the roles of both the Curate and the Artilleryman from the novel. Ray looks out the window to observe what's outside and notices Red Weed growing rampant and extending into the basement. The sounds of the tripods momentarily cease, and a tentacle-like probe enters the basement through a window, searches briefly, and is followed by three aliens, creatures with large heads, bipedal bodies and tentacle-like appendages. Out of site, Ray and Ogilvy fight over a gun while the aliens appear to communicate amongst themselves. A sound rings out from a nearby tripod and the aliens leave. Through the window, Ray sees a man outside plucked up by a tentacle, and using a device the aliens proceed to drain his blood for sustenance as in the novel. Meanwhile, Ogilvy continues to mirror the Curate and the Artilleryman, trying to dig his way out of the basement and discussing the formation of an underground resistance, leading to a scuffle with Ray.

The film cuts to Ray and Rachel sleeping when the tentacle-like probe, complete with a camera appears in front of Rachel, prompting Ray to strike it with an axe, which in turn scares Rachel into running upstairs. After the probe retreats Ray searches upstairs for Rachel, and eventually goes outside, spots a tripod, and tries to strike it with a grenade. It reacts by picking him up and placing him in a hanging cage filled with others, including Rachel. A tentacle reaches down and grabs hold of Ray, and as others try to pull him down, he pulls the pin of another grenade from inside the tripod. The tripod falls over, and the cage drops in the explosion, freeing those inside.

The sun rises and Ray and Rachel approach Boston, where withering Red Weed is seen surrounding a statue. Moving on foot, they see a fallen tripod leaning against a building, and a soldier explains that it had been behaving strangely, moving in circles. It briefly moves before being hit by an explosion delivered by the army, and a hatch opens, revealing an alien arm slowly creeping forward before collapsing. Ray and Rachel make it to the end of their journey and are rejoined by Robby, the children's mother, and others. In the closing sequence, the narrator returns, delivering lines adapted from the novel's ending.

Similarities to Novel

As is the case with the 1953 film adaptation of *The War of The Worlds*, scenes, characters, and details are paralleled in this film. Most notably is the similarity of Ogilvy to both the Curate and the Artilleryman who interact with the narrator of the novel. Ray's time in the basement with Ogilvy includes the struggle over a gun Ogilvy wants to shoot at the aliens in place of the struggle of the novel's protagonist to keep the Curate from revealing them. Later, Ogilvy embodies the Artilleryman in his attempt to dig his way out of the basement and his desire to form an underground resistance, mentioning the possible utilization of subway tunnels to connect humans while remaining hidden.

Additionally, many details of the aliens are maintained, including their process of draining humans' blood for nourishment and to an extent in their physique, which features a large head and tentacle-like appendages. As well, the aliens use a heat-ray style weapon and bring Red Weed along with them.

Another instance of similarity occurs when ray and his children are carjacked. This parallels the scene in the novel in which the narrator's brother is attacked repeatedly by others hoping to steal his cart. However, unlike the brother in the novel, Ray loses this battle and is forced to proceed on foot.
Significant Differences from Novel

Also in a similar fashion to the 1953 film adaptation of *The War of The Worlds*, this version is wrought with both major changes and smaller shifts from the novel. Aside from time and setting, the most major change is the method of invasion. Instead of riding in capsules shot by a rocket gun of sorts like in the novel, this adaptation follows a plot in which the aliens apparently buried their tripod machines underground millennia ago, and then ride down bolts of lightning in capsules, directly into their tripods. This proposes questions never answered in the film, such as why the machines were buried so long ago, why the aliens chose to strike when they did, and why, assuming they traveled to earth to bury these machines, they did not succumb to earthly bacteria at that time.

Another change occurs in the film’s terminology. Rather than “Martians” or “men from Mars,” these invaders are simply aliens. The change results from the exploration of Mars since the novel was written, which also caused changes in the opening narration, which in the novel mentions the earth’s proximity to Mars and details the Solar System.

Unlike both the novel and the 1953 film adaptation, no effort to make peace with the aliens occurs. The absence of a white flag scene goes unnoticed as the tripod begins to wage war as soon as it emerges, but this is still reflective of a less trusting culture and a perpetual state of fear.

While the novel was written in a time where invasion literature, stories which discussed the invasion of the British Empire, was relatively popular, this film was released in the midst of post-9/11 fears. When Ray returns home after seeing the first tripod, Rachel frantically asks if terrorists are attacking, also reminiscent of the 1953 film’s reflection of Cold War era fears.

As in the 1953 film, this version differs from the novel in that the attack is global. However, not all communication is cut off, as various governments and militia remain able to communicate.

3. “H.G. Wells’ *The War of the Worlds*” (also known as “The Classic War of the Worlds”)

Also released in 2005 was an independent film adaptation that stayed faithfully to the novel, maintaining the time and location as well as the storyline of the novel.

4. “H. G. Wells’ *War of the Worlds*” (also known as “Invasion” and “H. G. Wells’ The Worlds in War”)

The third adaptation of *The War of The Worlds* to be released in 2005, this film also moved the setting to modern times but transformed it into a horror film with stronger violence and gore.

A sequel to this film known as “War of the Worlds 2: The Next Wave” was released in 2008, in which a second fleet of aliens travel to earth, leading the U.S. Military to attack Mars.
H.G. Wells (pen name Geoffrey West), formally known as Herbert George Wells, was born September 21, 1866, to Joseph Wells and Sarah Neal in Bromley, Kent in England. He was the youngest of four children who grew up in a poverty stricken home. At the age of 14, Wells began to work as an apprentice to a draper and then an assistant to a chemist. As time went on, Wells, now 18, won a scholarship to study biology at Normal School (now known as Royal College) of Science in South Kensington, London. There he had the opportunity to have T.H. Huxley, an advocate of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution, as a professor which influenced his human evolution ideas in his writing. In 1888, Wells graduated from London University to become a science teacher.
In 1891, Wells married his cousin, Isabel Mary Wells. The marriage did not last long and ended when Wells ran away with a former pupil, Amy Catherine Robbins. The two wed in 1895 and though H.G. was known for his many affairs, the couple had two children George Philip in 1901 and Frank Richard in 1903. In 1927, Amy Catherine Robbins passed away which left H.G. a widower.

In 1893, Wells had published his first book, *Textbook of Biology*. H.G. began to develop a passion for writing about the future and astronomical fantasies. Between 1895 and 1904, Wells wrote seven science fiction novels including *The War of the Worlds, The First Men on the Moon, The Time Machine, The Wonderful Visit, and The Island of Doctor Moreau* which would influence the literary genre of science fiction. These novels took common fears of space and the future and stretched the imagination of science fiction novels. H.G. Wells also explored the area of comic novels of the lower middle class life. In 1900 Wells wrote *Love and Mr. Lewisham* and later wrote three more including: *Kipps: The Story of a Simple Soul, The History of Mr. Polly, Tono-Bungay*. Wells’ ideas for these stories developed from his own childhood experiences.

As Wells’ writing career continued, he began to focus on socialist ideas and humanity prospect views rather than the literary form of his novels. His experiences in biology and influences from World War I led him to think human society would evolve into higher form. Between 1901 and 1905, Wells wrote *Anticipation, Mankind in the Making, and A Modern Utopia* which shed light on Wells’ thoughts on development of humans. He was seen as a social progress leader and in 1903 joined Fabian Society which was an active socialist group. Wells eventually left the Fabian Society because of different political views.

By 1931, Wells continued to care about the progression of humans and published *The Science of Life* which was co-written by Julian Huxley and G.P. Wells, H.G. Wells’ first son. Wells then later published a novelized version of the film *The Shape of Things to Come* in 1933. During the last decade of his life, Wells dedicated his time to his social views and became a cofounder of Diabetes UK in 1934. Wells died of unclear causes at the age of 58 in London in 1946.


### Characters

**Narrator** - The narrator is a philosopher living on the English countryside in Woking with his wife. The novel is entirely composed of his first and second hand experiences (the latter of which are presumably relayed to him by his brother). The narrator commands reliability through his methodological and scientific tone. One could liken the narrator to an ethnographer, who attempts to communicate an experience as accurately as possible. At the same time, the reader sees how the Martian invasion triggers a survivalist attitude in him.

The narrator regarding himself: “At times I suffer from the strangest sense of detachment from myself and the world about me; I seem to watch it all from the outside, from somewhere inconceivably remote, out of time, out of space, out of the stress and tragedy of it all” (63).

**Brother** - The narrator’s brother is a medical student in London. The narrator tells of his experiences to vary the story and to demonstrate the effects of the Martian invasion in London, a large city and the heart of the British Empire. The narrator’s brother proves to be a strong, clear-minded, and compassionate individual. In his escape from London, the narrator’s brother guides two women (Mrs. Elphinstone and her sister-in-law) through the dangers of the exodus.

The narrator’s brother speaking to Mrs. Elphinstone as they escape a rough crowd on their journey to the English countryside: “‘Point the revolver at the man behind,’ he said, giving it to her, ‘if he presses us too hard. No!—point it at the horse’” (125).

**Artilleryman** - The artilleryman crosses paths with the narrator on two occasions. They first meet when they settle temporarily in the narrator’s house shortly after the attacks in Woking. The artilleryman shows military and survivalist prowess in their first encounter. But by their second meeting, the artilleryman has taken on a defeatist outlook. Toward the end of the novel, he talks about living in secrecy and buying his time until mankind can revolt against the Martians.

The artilleryman’s outlook on the fate of mankind: “It isn’t quite according to what a man wants for his species, but it’s about what the facts point to. And that’s the principle I acted upon. Cities, nations, civilizations, progress—-it’s all over. That game’s up. We’re beat” (168).

**Curate** - The curate is the religious figure in the novel. He meets the narrator on their journey toward London. The curate contrasts the calm, scientific character of the narrator by making frequent dramatic exclamations. He proves to be a poor survivalist and relies on the narrator, though he ignores the narrator’s suggestions of rationing food. In the end, the curate’s loud, despairing attitude causes the Martians to find him out and kill him.
The curate’s reaction to the Martian invasion: “Why are these things permitted? What sins have we done?...I was walking through the roads to clear my brain for the afternoon, and then—fire, earthquake, and death! As if it were Sodom and Gomorrah! All our work undone, and all the work—What are these Martians?” (96).

**Martians** - The Martians invade Earth, starting in England, in order to expand their species and use Earth’s resources. They are large headed creatures whose evolutionary progress has disposed of many features of human anatomy, most notably the digestive system.

The narrator regarding the Martian’s speech: “I have a certain claim to at least an elementary knowledge of psychology, and in this matter I am convinced—as firmly as I am convinced of anything—that the Martians interchanged thoughts without any physical intermediation” (147-48).

**Wife** - The narrator’s wife has little direct action in the novel, as she and the narrator part at Leatherhead. Though often distracted from his aims by the need to survive the invasion, the narrator makes it his overall goal to return to his wife. To both their surprise, they are reunited at the end of the novel in Woking.

The wife and the narrator discussing their escape plans: “We can’t possibly stay here’ I said; and as I spoke the firing reopened for a moment upon the common. ‘But where are we to go?’ said my wife in terror. I thought, perplexed. Then I remembered her cousins at Leatherhead. ‘Leatherhead’ I shouted above the sudden noise” (71).

**Ogilvy** - Ogilvy is an astronomer who initially takes interest in the explosion on the surface of Mars and the falling cylinders. He spreads the news about the cylinders, which he first thought were meteorites, and draws attention to the crash site. He is a scientific man who originally paid no attention to theories of life on Mars.

Ogilvy about the possibility of life on Mars: “The chances of anything man-like on Mars are a million to one,” he said” (46).

**Mrs. Elphinstone & Miss Elphinstone** - Mrs. Elphinstone and her sister-in-law are Londoners who are escaping the metropolis and travel with the narrator’s brother. Mrs. Elphinstone is the wife of a surgeon named George. She continually talks about finding her husband, while Miss Elphinstone, George’s sister, acts calm and follows the instructions of the narrator’s brother.
The narrator about Mrs. Elphinstone's panic over leaving England: “At the sight of the sea, Mrs. Elphinstone, in spite of the assurances of her sister-in-law, gave way to panic. She had never been out of England before, she would rather die than trust herself friendless in a foreign country, and so forth. She seemed, poor woman! to imagine that the French and the Martians might prove very similar” (130).


Stephen begins the article by commenting on the importance of The War of the Worlds as a metaphor for the war ravaged twentieth century. He then summarizes a number of film adaptations, sequels, and fan-fiction works that mirror, as Stephen phrases it, the original work and its continual influence throughout the twentieth century and at the beginning of the twenty-first centuries. Stephen then discusses War of the Worlds as a precursor or metaphor for the atrocities of the twentieth century, particularly the second world war.


Davidson’s article examines the ways in which Wells’s novel, The War of the Worlds, falls under the realm of myth in the traditional Greek sense of the word (Hubris clobbered by Nemesis). The article discusses science fiction and Wells’s reading history steeped in Greek literature before examining the novel’s evolutionary depictions on the Martians and the influence of Greek myth on them. Davidson continues in the way and draws connections between The War of the Worlds and Greek mythology, in regards to both small details in the novel, as well as broad themes.

Haskin, Byron, Dir. The War of the Worlds. Paramount Pictures: 1953, Film.

A film adaptation of H.G. Wells’ novel.


A film adaptation of H.G. Wells’ novel.


A film adaptation of H.G. Wells’ novel.

A film adaptation of H.G. Wells' novel.


The timeline on this site gives a day-by-day account of the events in the novel. The rest of the website has plenty of information about the use of technology, mostly Martian technology, as well as plenty of analysis of the various contemporary reworkings of the novel.


Jeff Wayne's 1981 musical adaptation of Wells' novel, which has spawned it's own franchises including a video game based upon it.


This article is a review from June 23rd, 1900, two years after H.G. Wells wrote his famous novel. It gives great insight as to what people thought of this author and his works as well as calling him “groundbreaking” and “a literary explorer.”


The original text with annotations and appendices.

Google Maps
A map of locations mentioned in the novel.

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First written in 1898 by the well-known science fiction writer H.G. Wells, War of the Worlds was dramatized on October 30, 1938 in a CBS radio drama series Mercury Theatre on the Air. The infamous broadcast was produced by John Houseman and primarily written by Howard Koch and Anne Froelich with scattered input from Orson Welles and staff. The radio rendition was presented in such a way that it caused general unrest and panic, attracting a lot of press coverage. In fact, it caused such a disturbance that for the next few years there was legislation banning the “news” format in any and all radio drama.

To incite a fear that would hit closer to home, the setting of the broadcast took place in what is now known as Grover’s Mill, which, at the time, was a shadow of a village in West Windsor Township, New Jersey. It simulated a live newscast and was told in a manner that presented facts as if they were developing moment to moment. For instance, the first two-thirds of the near hour-long play was essentially a retelling of the events in the novel; however, as stated, the setting was in the U.S. and the events unfolded as a news bulletin.

Unbeknownst to many listeners at the time of the airing, the play was in fact a farce. Listeners were tuning in and hearing only a portion of the story and, given the growing anxiety of World War II, many of them assumed it to be true. Despite the repeated notices that the broadcast was fictional, the strife and panic made headlines nationwide with one Richard J. Hand citing studies that stated, “some six million heard the CBS broadcast; 1.7 million believed it to be true, and 1.2 million were ‘genuinely frightened’”. It is estimated that there were over 12,000 newspaper articles covering the broadcast itself, or the impact it had on citizens. Amazingly, Welles and the Mercury Theatre remained unscathed throughout and during the aftermath of the chaos that ensued (they were, however, censured).

Oddly enough, for the 50th anniversary of the broadcast, West Windsor Township held a martian festival in its honor.

Reception

Reviews taken from the 2003 Broadview Literary Texts version of *The War of the Worlds*:


In this review taken from the *Spectator* in 1898, the editor and politician John ST. Loe Strachey commends Wells on his remarkable narration skills in his novel. He compares Wells to Poe, saying that Poe’s work may have been greater than Wells but “Mr. Wells has a well-cultivated instinct for style” (223).

He goes on to say that Wells’ idea of aliens is not original, but he does flourish in “the art of securing the sympathy of his readers” by bringing “the awful creatures of another sphere to Woking Junction, and places them, with all their abhorred dexterity, in the most homely and familiar surroundings” (224).

Strachey ends his review by saying that Wells was successful in two things: the first is “the imagining of the Martians, their descent upon the earth and their final overthrow” (225). The second is that he has “notable success in his description of the moral effects produced on a great city by the attack of a ruthless enemy” (226).

2. From an unsigned review. *Academy* 29 January 1898, liv, 121-22.

This review begins by stating that Wells probably has more fans among people engaged in science than people in the general public. In opposition to the first review, this article commends Wells on his original idea, saying that “the fact that Mr. Wells has been able to present the planet Mars in a new light is in itself a testimony to originality. The planet has been brought within the world of fiction by several writers, but in the *War of the Worlds* aspect of it is dealt with altogether different from what has gone on before. WE have had a number of stories of journeys to Mars, but hitherto, so far as we remember, the idea of an invasion by inhabitants of Mars has not been exploited” (227).

Interestingly, this review agrees with Wells that if aliens indeed invade the world, it is smart to think that they are of higher intelligence than mankind. The writer attributes this reasoning to all speculation of UFO sightings and research, saying that they would have to be more intelligent than us “to explain the phenomena.”

The review ends with high praise, saying that science is one of the main reasons the novel is so appealing. The review ends by saying “Already, Mr. Wells has his imitators, but their labored productions, distinguished either by prolixity or inaccuracy, neither excite the admiration of scientific readers nor attract the attention of the world in general” (229).
Image Gallery

Screenshot from Steven Spielberg's film, War of the Worlds (Source: Wiki Commons)

Jules Verne (Source: Wiki Commons)

H.G. Wells (Source: Wiki Commons)

Sculpture of a Tripod in Woking, England (Source: Wiki Commons)

The Original Cover of The War of the Worlds (Source: Wiki Commons)

Painting of the Martians vs. The Thunder Child (Source: Wiki Commons)