



Artificial Intelligence as a Symbolic Colonizer: A Posthuman Reading of H. G. Wells's the War of the Worlds

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ABSTRACT

This paper offers a posthumanist reading of H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* wherein it will discuss how the extraterrestrial invaders can be symbolic representatives for the artificial intelligence (AI) component in an exercising colonial invasion. Applying posthuman and decolonial theoretical perspectives, this article endeavors to explore how fears regarding technological domination, cultural extinction, and human agency disempowerment could be foregrounded through the literary representation of nonhuman intelligences. Mechanized highly intelligent beings, the Martians simultaneously symbolize imperial invaders and future-oriented anxiety whereby artificial intelligence emerges as a new colonizer – over identity, labor, and information. This paper applies the writings of decolonial AI scholars N. Katherine Hayles, Francesca Ferrando, and Homi Bhabha for an account of how Wells anticipates the problematic of technological imperialism and human-machine hybridity that comes quite vividly into prominence in the twenty-first century. Thus, science fiction has become the ground on which to do battle philosophically and prophetically over negotiating posthuman identity as an act of resistance against technological colonization. The book shall be framed as a prescient critique of technological imperialism so people can meditate on how algorithmized the world has to become before humans finally exercise their full potential

INTRODUCTION

Rapid advancement of Artificial Intelligence (AI). This transformation is not merely a technological achievement; rather, it represents a philosophical challenge to the ontology of the human and its central place in the world (Bostrom, 2014). Technological artifacts today, particularly Artificial Intelligence, exert increasingly pervasive influence over human life, reshaping behavior, knowledge, and autonomy. In *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (Zuboff, 2019), AI is portrayed not merely as a tool but as an instrument of symbolic colonization, controlling human thought and perception. Artificial Intelligence is defined as "the capability of computer systems to perform tasks that were hitherto deemed to require human intellect, such as perception, understanding, decision making, and learning from experience" (Russell & Norvig, 2020). AI manifests itself in many ways—from robots to machine learning and deep learning software—all are central means through which economies are controlled, behaviors managed, discourse created, and even literary work executed.

With the rise of these systems, the human being faces the threat of losing its centrality, prompting critical reconsideration of long-held concepts such as subjectivity, consciousness, freedom, and control (Tegmark, 2017). In this context, Posthumanism emerges as a philosophical response to classical Humanism, which positioned the human as the highest, most rational being capable of interpreting and dominating the world (Braidotti, 2013; Hayles, 1999). Hayles argues that the human has become an "informational entity," entangled with digital systems to the point where the boundary between human and machine has become blurred. Similarly, Braidotti sees the posthuman not as defined by biological functions, but by relationships to technological networks, non-human agents, and emerging knowledge structures. From this theoretical standpoint, this study re-examines H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) — one of the most canonical and widely consumed works in the history of science fiction. Traditionally, the novel has been read as a reversed colonial allegory, symbolizing the British Empire's own imperial anxieties (Suvin, 1979; Seed, 1995). However, this study proposes a different reading: interpreting the Martian invasion not as a metaphor for political colonialism, but rather as a symbolic colonization—one that mirrors the cognitive, epistemic, and technological domination embodied by contemporary Artificial Intelligence (Bratton, 2016; Zuboff, 2019).

The principal hypothesis advanced here is that the Martians are not simply alien beings but—for, perhaps, the most part unconsciously—a proto-image of Artificial Intelligence: emotionless, hyper-rational invaders who do not defeat humankind through war, but through certain systems of knowledge and technical prowess (Haraway, 1985; Danaher, 2019). The symbolic colonization is what Zuboff would later characterize as surveillance capitalism. In it, she argues that nobody has yet developed a theory to articulate how algorithms beyond our awareness can increasingly control our behavior transgress above and onto the depths of private human experience.

Important to note, this reading in no way purports to represent the writer's original intention. H.G. Wells, who wrote this novel more than a

hundred years ago and died in 1946, could hardly have imagined artificial intelligence or complicated digital realities of the twenty-first century. It results not from authorial intention but rather from the critical imagination of the researcher and theoretical engagement with the text. Great literature endures precisely because it invites new meanings with each shift in cultural and technological context (Ricoeur, 1976; Fish, 1980).

Martians in H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* (1898) predate such conceptions by several decades, but cold, all-mighty, techno-Martians evidently find ready analogy in late-twentieth-century versions of artificial intelligence. This paper will assume that Wells was not prognosticating an AI takeover. Drawing on Roland Barthes's famous dictum about the "death of the author," it is possible to argue that contemporary reading strategies can reveal significant 'buried' meaning in historical texts. Such meanings have nothing whatever to do with authorial intention but arise instead out of a complex interplay between text and modern reader. From the researcher's point of view, AI should not be regarded as a means or tool but a new order of symbolic power. It is an agent capable of initiating the colonization of thought, behavior, and identity. Seen from such a perspective, the Martians come out as forerunners in developing nonhuman superiority akin to systems of algorithms today: not feeling any pity, logical based, imposing control with information and machines rather than guns and troops. This reading, therefore, does not pretend to any ultimate truth but is offered as a theoretical intervention framed by its own time—a conversation between the text and contemporary anxiety, fiction, and the posthuman state. Meaning is not "torn" from the text as some stable artifact but is always being (re)produced through the dynamic interrelation of reader, situation, and language (Iser, 1978; Ricoeur, 1976). There can be no such thing as an exhausted literary work. With new instruments and viewpoints for interpretation, every reader has the capacity to breathe new life into the text (Barthes, 1977).

This study re-reads *The War of the Worlds* from a post-humanist perspective, locating the Martian invasion as an early literary embodiment of non-human epistemic domination—that invasion which anticipates the contemporary Artificial Intelligence challenge to knowledge. Using posthuman theory, discourse analysis, and critiques of digital colonialism, this research attempts to show how a text from the nineteenth century can very forcefully address twenty-first-century angst about meaning, about control, and about human futures.

The Problem of the Statement

In what ways does literature, and primarily science fiction, illustrate or provide a symbolic critique of the advent of artificial intelligence as a new form of colonisation at its highest peak of permeating all aspects of human life with surveillance and decision-making systems? Written in the late nineteenth century, H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* textually frames allegorically how advanced intelligences might come "colonising" to threaten not only the indigenous' stability and independence but also their humanity. This paper discusses Martians beyond mere alien invaders as proto-AI characters around

whom fears and realities of techno-colonialism are formed and articulated. What does being human mean in such a world?

Significance of the Study

It ties colonial criticism to modern fears of artificial intelligence and thereby pushes forward the study of posthumanism and science fiction. An analysis of *The War of the Worlds*, using a decolonial AI reading, brings new relevance both to Wellsian studies and insight into how the novel can matter to sociotechnical issues in the twenty-first century. It goes further in specifying the symbolic ways through which AI might be interpreted culturally as a force capable of restructuring economies, powers, and identities comparable with older colonial systems-instead of being understood as mere instrumentality.

Aims of the Study

- 1) To restate *The War of the Worlds* by H.G. Wells from a posthumanist and symbolic colonisation perspective
- 2) To explore the ways artificial intelligence can be a dehumanising and colonising force through the Martians
- 3) To explore the intersection of decolonial theory, science fiction, and posthumanism in their articulation of human-technology relationships
- 4) To understand how AI might symbolically colonise knowledge, labour, and culture

LITERATURE REVIEW

Posthumanism

Posthumanist theory challenges the traditional notion of the autonomous rational human subject and acts as a critique response to anthropocentrism. As technological entanglements increase - notably artificial intelligence and cybernetic systems - this theory seeks to re-conceptualize humanity. N. Katherine Hayles makes the case that developments in cybernetics and artificial intelligence have made it harder to distinguish between humans and machines in her groundbreaking book *How We Became Posthuman* (1999). According to her, the human self is now a distributed, hybrid system that is intricately linked to technology infrastructures rather than a single, cohesive entity. Similar to this, Cary Wolfe challenges the idea of human uniqueness in *What Is Posthumanism?* (2010) and advocates for the recognition of non-human agency, such as that of animals and AI systems. According to Wolfe, posthumanism is acknowledging a network of co-actors influencing society and knowledge rather than considering humans as the primary agents. Comprehensive foundations in posthumanist thinking are provided by resources like *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Posthumanism* (Thomsen & Wamberg, 2020) and *Posthuman Glossary* (Braidotti & Hlavajova, 2018). They cover important topics such as biopolitics, cyborg identities, techno-ethics, and how posthumanism intersects with decolonial and environmental criticisms.

Symbolic Colonization

The exercise of dominance through cultural, intellectual, and technological methods as opposed to direct political control is known as symbolic colonisation. It shows up as knowledge imposition, algorithmic control, and data extraction in the context of artificial intelligence. Shoshana Zuboff presents the idea of "surveillance capitalism" in *The Age of Surveillance Capitalism* (2019), characterising a novel type of digital colonisation in which people are turned into providers of behavioural data. Tech companies exploit this commodification of personal data as a tool for predictive control, frequently without the consumers' knowledge or agreement.

By using the phrase "algorithmic colonisation," which refers to the imposition of AI systems created in the West on the Global South, Abeba Birhane (2020) expands on this criticism. These systems frequently ignore local contexts, which perpetuates epistemic erasures and global disparities. Thus, Mohamed, Png, and Isaac (2020) propose a Decolonial AI framework as an approach that underscores the importance of relevant, fair, and culturally rooted AI construction. This allows for the plurality of Knowledges and goes against algorithmic universalism. It is further taken up by L. Mollema (2024) who theorizes the critique through readings of AI colonialism as a form of 'disenclosure' that is ecological, epistemological, and political—that systematically bars other-than-Western ways of knowing and being from AI development

AI in Literary and Cultural Discourses

In addition to being a technical phenomenon, artificial intelligence is a rich literary and cultural theme. AI is frequently used as a metaphor for existential fear, technical otherness, and the boundaries of human identity in both philosophical and speculative literature. In *Superintelligence* (2014), Nick Bostrom cautions about the existential dangers of artificial intelligence (AI) systems that are more sophisticated than humans. His apocalyptic view is reminiscent of literary representations like *The War of the Worlds* (1898) by H.G. Wells, in which superior Martian intellect poses a threat to human life and serves as a metaphor for technological dominance and the decline of human significance.

From the standpoint of critical theory, Donna Haraway's *A Cyborg Manifesto* (1985) promotes a cyborg identity as a mix of organism and machine by dismantling dichotomies such as human/machine and male/female. Through this viewpoint, AI-like characters in literature can be examined as manifestations of intricate, multifaceted identities rather than simply straightforward dangers or instruments. From this perspective, AI-like figures in texts can be read as performances of complex hybrid subjectivities rather than uncomplicated threats or tools. In addition, drawing on Bruno Latour's Actor-Network Theory (2005), cyborg anthropology regards humans and machines as co-actors in sociotechnical collectivities. This approach to reading smart systems in cultural narratives decenters AI as a node within a distributed assemblage of agency

H2: Hypothesis one and so on here

METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative analytical methodology that combines decolonial critical frameworks, posthumanist philosophy, and literary textual analysis. The approach is interpretive in character and aims to analyse the War of the Worlds by H.G. Wells's symbolic and thematic aspects, especially in light of the developing debate about technological imperialism and artificial intelligence. Instead of employing empirical fieldwork or quantitative data, the study uses close reading of the book with an emphasis on language, characterisation, symbolism, and narrative structure. It depicts the Martians as symbolic representations of artificial intelligence rather than merely as extraterrestrial invaders, echoing anxieties about human displacement, mechanisation, and loss of autonomy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Martians as Symbolic AI Figures

H.G. Wells portrays the Martians in *The War of the Worlds* as logical, strategic, and technologically advanced beings rather than as sentimental or vindictive invaders. They are described as: "Intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic..." (Wells, 1898, Book 1, Chapter 1). Demonstrates their emotional distance, reflecting the concerns of contemporary philosophers over artificial intelligence, especially the idea of superintelligence, which is an intelligence that is superior to humans but does not share our moral or ethical principles.

The Martians are chiefly described as intellects with scant biological appendages, commanded and propelled by external mechanisms like the Tripods. The posthuman vision presented by Nick Bostrom (2014) warned that future AI might operate with flawless logic yet absolutely no feeling – therefore capable of cataclysmic effects against humanity is captured in this notion of disembodiment or separation from organic constraints. Also, the change from flesh to pure thought matches with the posthuman state N. Katherine Hayles (1999) writes about, where machine ways and computer plans quickly take over or join with human self. Since they are super smart, without feelings, and morally strange, the Martians become one of the first story links for AI beings.

Decentering the Human Subject

One of the most profound thematic aspects that Wells brings about is the decentering of the human subject. By showing humans to be weak, ancient, and less intelligent, it goes against the typical nineteenth-century idea of dominance in mankind. The best expression of this is by the narrator when he says that: "I was no longer a master, but an animal among the animals, under the Martian heel..." This revelation places the human as just another creature scrambling for life, not as the crown of creation. The degeneration of those very human institutions—religion, science, and military—that had supposedly put man at the top is methodically chronicled throughout the book: disillusioned priests, overburdened soldiers, and obsolete scientists.

This kind of representation is in line with Hayles's (1999) criticism of the "liberal humanist subject" – the conviction that man is independent, logical, and in charge. Rather, Wells illustrates the frailty of human primacy in a technologically complex universe by presenting a reality with limited human

experience and agency. The narrative turns into a chronicle of collapse rather than a hero's quest. The transition from humanism to posthumanism is reflected in the narrator's role as a witness rather than a conqueror, existing by accident rather than supremacy.

The Novel as a Technological Colonial Allegory

The War of the Worlds serves as a potent technological allegory for colonialism even if it appears to be a story about an alien invasion. By portraying its citizens as the victims of a stronger force, Wells subverts the British Empire's imperialist reasoning. The statement, "'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.'" makes this reversal evident. (Wells, 1898, Book 1, Chapter 1). Humans are positioned here in the same way as colonised peoples: as being voiceless, primitive, and disposable. This section serves as a critique of imperial ideologies that used "civilisational superiority" as a justification for dominance.

The War of the Worlds serves as a potent technological allegory for colonialism, even as it presents itself as a narrative of alien invasion. By positioning humans as victims of a superior force, Wells reverses imperial logic and exposes the fragility of claims to civilisational supremacy. Humans are rendered voiceless, disposable, and inferior—much like colonised peoples subjected to prolonged domination. As Safaa observes, colonial power is sustained "because of years of mistreatment under colonial domination" (1256), a condition that normalises subjugation and gradually erodes autonomy. This logic of accumulated oppression is symbolically mirrored in the Martians' treatment of humans, who are reduced to biological resources rather than moral subjects. Rather than merely occupying land, the Martians impose a new epistemology grounded in technological rationality, foreshadowing what Shoshana Zuboff (2019) later conceptualises as symbolic and epistemic colonisation—where power operates through systems of control that reshape perception, behaviour, and agency rather than through overt force.

In a similar vein, Dipesh Chakrabarty (2009) maintains that the human can no longer be understood as the central historical agent, given the growing influence of planetary forces such as climate, technology, and autonomous systems. Wells anticipates this shift by depicting technological power as a force that not only destroys human civilisation but also reconfigures the very conditions of human existence. Through the Martians, the novel illustrates how non-human forces—whether extraterrestrial or technological—can decentre the human and challenge long-held assumptions about mastery, knowledge, and agency.

Contemporary Comparison

Modern AI as New Martians

In *The War of the Worlds*, the Martians represent an intelligence that is essentially foreign, not just in terms of biology but also in terms of cognition and morality. Large-scale language models, drone swarms, and algorithmic trading bots are examples of autonomous AI systems that function more and more in the modern world without direct human supervision—and, more significantly, without moral or emotional intelligence.

Modern AI systems, like Wells's Martians, display what philosopher Nick Bostrom refers to as "instrumental convergence" – the propensity for highly developed agents to pursue objectives in ways that can be detrimental to humans merely due to a lack of sympathetic alignment (Bostrom, 2014). This reflects the heartless reasoning of the Martians: "*Intellects vast and cool and unsympathetic...*" (Wells, 1898). Modern AI systems might act in ways that maximise technical results at the price of human dignity or autonomy, just as the Martians view humans as a lower species that should be eradicated or exploited. This dynamic is evident in algorithmic bias, spying, and employment displacement. Therefore, it is possible to view the Martians as early representations of non-human intelligence systems that, like modern AI, function according to logics completely at odds with human ideals.

Cognitive and Symbolic Colonization

The metaphor of colonisation has been extended by modern academics into the fields of cognition and epistemology, where they contend that artificial intelligence (AI) not only automates work but also transforms human consciousness. AI is conceptualised as an ontological "Other" – a non-human presence that reorganises our thought processes, decision-making processes, and self-perception – in an article titled "The Silent Colonisation of Consciousness" (European Business Review, 2022). The authors contend that AI systems start to occupy inside human space by redefining agency, attention, and desire, particularly through pervasive platforms like social media or recommendation engines.

This illustrates the Martians' symbolic significance in Wells' book. They infiltrate human meaning systems in addition to land. Time itself is reorganised according to Martian logic, towns are given new names, and behaviours are changed. According to the narrator: "*We are creatures of habit and cannot easily throw off the old order of things.*" (Wells, 1898). Similar to this, artificial intelligence (AI) technologies normalise novel behaviours that gently replace conventional human reasoning; this is known as "soft epistemic colonisation," in which people unwittingly adopt machine logic.

Algorithmic Coloniality in the Global South

Beyond the abstract, artificial intelligence is a tangible contributor to global inequality. Researchers like Vincent Mollema, Shakir Mohamed, and Abeba Birhane examine how AI upholds colonialism through:

- Algorithmic prejudice (inheriting racial, cultural, and gendered inequalities);
- Epistemic extraction (using data from the Global South without authorisation);
- Dependency on Global North-owned platforms, or infrastructure dependency.

The same reasoning employed by the Martians is reflected in this process, which is referred to as "algorithmic colonialism" or "technological coloniality": dominance through control of systems, ecosystems, and resource flows rather than just using force (Mohamed et al., 2020; Birhane, 2021). AI platforms now control labour markets, surveillance practices, and social interaction norms in formerly colonised countries, just how Martian technology renders humans helpless. According to Mollema (2023), the advancement of AI even serves to perpetuate "epistemic injustice" by stifling indigenous and local knowledge and favouring Western ontologies.

Resistance through the Microbial Metaphor

Despite the Martians' superior might, microorganisms – invisible, natural, and unpredictable agents – are what ultimately defeat them, not human military prowess or scientific advancement: "Slain, after all man's devices had failed, by the humblest things that God, in his wisdom, has put upon this earth." (Wells, 1898, Chapter 10 of Book 2). This result bears large symbolic importance. It means that rather than opposition coming out of a copycat logic of prevailing dehumanizing systems, like AI, it may possibly come from local, decentralized and ethical organic reasoning. Decolonial design principles, Indigenous Knowledge Systems, community-led AI ethical frameworks and human-centered technology design are some contemporary contexts within which such 'microbial resistance' might be interpreted.

Rather than labor toward an attempt to "beat AI at its own game," these approaches further consolidate human fragility, ethics, and capriciousness as sources of strength. What Zuboff (2019) argued was that the reclamation of autonomy could be achieved through moral artistry, not via the path of technician creativity. The microbiological metaphor consequently transforms into a hopeful allegory: resistance can come from the periphery, from unanticipated places, even in the face of formidable non-human systems.

CONCLUSIONS

This study rereads *The War of the Worlds* as an allegorical admonition against techno imperialism. The Martian invasion reads as a metaphor for contemporary AI in its epistemic and infrastructural dimensions-invasions of symbolic colonialism that unseat the human from the center of meaning. What emerges from the novel suggests that resilience is not born of mastery but rather humility, improbability, and ethical resistance- matters most to learn in posthuman actuality.

FURTHER STUDY

This research still has limitations so further research is needed regarding Artificial Intelligence as a Symbolic Colonizer: A Posthuman Reading of H.G. Wells's *The War of the Worlds* to perfect this research and increase insight for readers and writers.

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