

**H. G. WELLS, *WHEN THE SLEEPER WAKES*, EDITED BY JOHN SUTHERLAND (PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO: BROADVIEW, 2019) ISBN 978-1-55481-352-0 (PB) \$17.95 [JEREMY WITHERS]**

Within the canon of science fiction literature, the place of H. G. Wells's *When the Sleeper Wakes* is far less secure than his more well-known and revered 'scientific romances', such as *The Time Machine*, *The Invisible Man*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, and *The War of the Worlds*. Wells himself, notably, did not care much for *When the Sleeper Wakes*, referring to it in a 1910 preface as 'one of the most ambitious and least satisfactory of my books', a novel tarnished by 'marks of haste'. Wells was working on *Love and Mr. Lewisham* at the same time as *Sleeper*, but admits in this same preface that the former work had 'a very much stronger hold upon my affections'.

And yet, *When the Sleeper Awakes* still captivates. For one thing, the novel's long and diverse influence is undeniable. As Sutherland explains in his introduction and in one of his appendices, people ranging from the Bolsheviks to the Italian Futurists, from Fritz Lang to Woody Allen, have found something to admire and imitate in Wells's tale of overpopulated London in the year 2100. Iconic science fiction writers like George Orwell and Arthur C. Clarke certainly knew *Sleeper*, too, and drew upon it in their masterpieces *Nineteen Eighty-Four* and *The City and the Stars*, respectively. In fact, we might say that one of the most prolific and popular subgenres of literature in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries – the dystopian novel – owes its genesis to this work, for *When the Sleeper Wakes* is arguably the first intricately detailed yet deeply pessimistic portrayal of a futuristic society. *Sleeper* brims with many devices and gadgets that anticipate actual inventions soon to appear after *Sleeper*'s publication: electricity-producing windmills, moving sidewalks and escalators, aeroplanes, television, and so forth. Yet such technological progress is only a distraction from – or worse, even a contributor to – the widespread exploitation and misery among the population of Wells's futuristic London.

Wells did, however, have good reason to judge *When the Sleeper Awakes* as being an imperfect work. Regarding the 1899 edition of the novel (which Sutherland bases his text on), Wells criticised himself for the inept handling of the romantic relationship between Graham and Helen Wotton, as well as his ambiguous ending suggestive of a hopeful triumph of good over evil. Wells tried to improve upon these aspects of the novel for his 1910 edition (which he also retitled *The Sleeper Awakes*). However, in retrospect, the 1899 edition of the novel is marred by far graver sins than those that involve an insipid romance. Most prominently, *Sleeper* reveals Wells at his most repugnant when it comes to handling issues of race. The novel's portrayal of an army of brutal Africans being flown to England (and elsewhere) to help suppress uprisings by the working class is unabashedly racist. Thankfully, in his introduction, Sutherland does not shy away from addressing such odious aspects of the work. Additionally, *Sleeper* suffers from its at times sympathetic references to eugenics and Nietzschean Übermensch theory.

Despite these flaws – and maybe because of them – this novel deserves to be studied by a larger audience, and John Sutherland is well suited to the task of helping to bring *When the Sleeper Wakes* to more readers. Currently the Lord Northcliffe Professor Emeritus of Modern English Literature at University College London, he is an established scholar of Victorian literature with a long publishing career. After providing a brief overview of Wells's life and of *Sleeper*'s plot, Sutherland uses his introduction to contextualise the novel adeptly within late-Victorian debates about utopia, degeneration, economics, and others. The footnotes located on almost every page usefully explain esoteric words or historical references, and draw enlightening connections between various parts of Wells's novel or between *Sleeper* and other Victorian works.

The five appendices Sutherland created for the end of the volume are also useful and enlightening. Appendix A focuses on contemporary reviews and includes a good mixture of positive, negative, and mixed evaluations. The second appendix features two prefaces that Wells wrote (including the 1910 one) for *Sleeper* when it was published in subsequent editions. This appendix also includes a brief excerpt from Wells's *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934), in which he discusses the writing of *Sleeper* and its origin in 'an exaggeration of contemporary tendencies' (what science fiction scholars today would call 'extrapolation'). Appendix C turns to visual representation by including four illustrations created by Henri Lanos to accompany some early appearances of the novel. Excerpts from a few important utopian works that preceded *Sleeper* comprise the fourth appendix: W. H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1887), William Morris's *News from Nowhere* (1890), and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward, 2000-1887* (1888). Sutherland's main point with these excerpts is to highlight how striking Wells's

pessimism was for its time given the fact that, when *Sleeper* appeared, futuristic works often took the form of optimistic utopias like the ones by Hudson, Morris, and Bellamy. The last appendix returns to a focus on visual representation by discussing two films inspired by *When the Sleeper Wakes*: Fritz Lang's *Metropolis* (1927) and Woody Allen's *Sleeper* (1973). Wells knew of the first film and condemned it in a *New York Times* review for its improbable prophecies and what he saw as plagiarism of his own work. Allen's *Sleeper* came out, of course, after Wells's death and (befitting Allen's early work) is a highly irreverent, comical take on the main premise of *When the Sleeper Wakes*.

In sum, this is another commendable volume by Broadview Press. This Canadian publisher continues to produce high-quality, classroom-friendly, affordable editions of many literary works, and their roster of texts by H. G. Wells is now up to half a dozen titles. In addition to *When the Sleeper Wakes*, they also offer admirable editions of *The Time Machine*, *The War of the Worlds*, *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, *The Invisible Man*, and *Ann Veronica*. One can only hope that we continue to see more Wells volumes published by this press, including more non-scientific fantasy ones to stand beside the lone realist work, *Ann Veronica*, in that list.