

H. G. WELLS, *THE INVISIBLE MAN: A GROTESQUE ROMANCE*, EDITED BY NICOLE LOBDELL AND NANCEE REEVES (PETERBOROUGH, ONTARIO: BROADVIEW, 2018) ISBN 978-1-55481-273-8 (PB) \$13.95 [PATRICK PARRINDER]

If H. G. Wells had written nothing apart from *The Invisible Man* and a few short stories, he would still be remembered as a popular novelist – though not, I suspect, for his ideas. Subtitled ‘A Grotesque Romance’, *The Invisible Man* is a horror story mixing light comedy with darker scientific and political themes. It is not, however, intellectually disturbing to the same degree as its two predecessors, *The Time Machine* and *The Island of Doctor Moreau*, or its immediate successor, *The War of the Worlds*. As Christopher Priest writes in his Introduction to the 2005 Penguin edition, it is a ‘young writer’s novel’, and also one with a particular attraction for young readers. For me, and doubtless many others, it was very much part of my adolescent discovery of Wells. In narrative terms, it is much less complex than other contemporary horror classics, such as Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (also first published in 1897) and Henry James’s *The Turn of the Screw*. The arrival of a mysterious stranger at the Coach and Horses inn in rural Sussex plunges us straight into the action, and few novels grab the reader’s attention quite so swiftly.

The editors of the new Broadview edition pay attention to the story’s many film versions, but they do not add that it has also been successfully adapted for the stage, with the slapstick comedy element being suitably highlighted. Representing invisibility on stage is a still more intriguing challenge than representing it on the screen – and, of course, Wells’s own handling of invisibility will always be a major talking-point. When the young Arnold Bennett reviewed *The Invisible Man* in the magazine *Woman*, which he then edited, he noted that ‘the Idea is not a new one – I think I have met with it several times before – but it is worked with an ingenuity, a realism, an inevitableness, which no previous worker in the field of “grotesque romance”, has ever approached’ (quoted in Appendix C, p. 190 of this edition). Previous editors of *The Invisible Man* have set out to identify the tales of invisibility that might have been already familiar to a late nineteenth-century reader, and Nicole Lobdell and Nancee Reeves build on their work by reprinting extracts from such long-forgotten stories as James Dalton’s *The Invisible Gentleman* (1833) and Edward Page Mitchell’s ‘The Crystal Man’ (1881).

Since this is a Broadview edition aimed primarily at university and college students, it offers fifty pages of appendices bringing together a variety of contemporary documents, including extracts from contemporary scientific writings about albinism, X-rays, and radio waves. Both here and in the editorial Introduction, the student is invited to take the story’s scientific context much more seriously than I can have done when I first read it. There is much less coverage of *The Invisible Man*’s political overtones, apart from a rather unfocused and potentially misleading reference to Wells’s interest in the scientific possibilities of eugenics (possibilities, we should recall, that are very much alive in today’s context of genetic engineering and gene editing). Other editors have discussed Griffin as a would-be terrorist in the tradition of late nineteenth-century anarchism and the Nietzschean ‘will to power’; Lobdell and Reeves, however, are more interested in portraying him as an outsider in relation to the British class system. They also supply an extensive textual apparatus, acknowledging the work of previous editors and, in particular, the pioneering scholarship of the late David Lake. The first of their seven appendices copies Lake’s 1996 ‘World’s Classics’ edition in setting out four different versions of Wells’s ending – that is, of the brief concluding paragraphs at the end of Chapter 28 (before the Epilogue) summing up how, in Lobdell and Reeves’s preferred textual version, Griffin ‘ended in infinite disaster his strange and terrible career’.

Unusually for Wells, there are no surviving manuscripts of *The Invisible Man*. It seems to have been completed in a hurry and in something of a muddle. Wells’s four endings all date from 1897, being found in the *Pearson’s Weekly* serial, the first and second book editions published by Pearson, and the Arnold edition published in New York. Only the latter two editions contain the Epilogue. Lobdell and Reeves differ from previous editors in choosing the second (November 1897) Pearson edition as their copy-text, but with ‘select emendations’ (40), not all of which are signalled. For example, in Chapter 17 they have inserted the American spelling of ‘whiskey’ in place of the glass of ‘whisky’ which, in Pearson and subsequent British editions, Kemp offers to Griffin. The editors also seem to hold Wells personally responsible for textual changes over which he can have had little or no control and which are contrary to his normal authorial practice, such as the replacement of ellipses with em-dashes in US editions of *The Invisible Man*, and the change from ‘Winchester’ to ‘Manchester’ at a point in the story

where it makes no geographical sense and presumably arises from a copyist's misreading of Wells's handwriting (50n, 154n).

While most of their textual annotations are helpful and informative, the fact that nouns such as brain-worker, clothes-horse, éclat, funk, laburnum, lumber, and serviette are provided with explanatory footnotes suggests that the editors have mainly had North American readers in mind. They also offer a wholly baffling response to Kemp's remark in Chapter 20 that strychnine is 'the palaeolithic in a bottle': 'The reference and Wells's meaning here are obscure' (127n). Kemp's remark was so far from being obscure to contemporary readers that it was quoted approvingly by the 1897 *New York Times* reviewer (see p. 195 in this edition); nor is it difficult to understand today. It is glossed in a footnote to Leon Stover's 1998 edition of *The Invisible Man*, which Lobdell and Reeves list in their bibliography, and other editors have not thought it needed explaining at all. This is a curious blind spot in what is otherwise a carefully-produced and very welcome new edition.