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Sebastian P. Klinger, *Sleep Works: Experiments in Science and Literature, 1899-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2025) 255 pp. £45.00 Hb. ISBN: 9781421450803

In *Sleep Works*, historian and literary scholar Sebastian P. Klinger sets out to provide a 'comprehensive account' of early twentieth century scientific, pharmaceutical and literary understandings of sleep (134). By examining developments in early sleep science that promoted it as an 'active' and vital process (17), Klinger's intervention is refreshing in distancing the subject from the historically dominant branch of psychoanalytic dream interpretation. Contributing to the emerging field of critical sleep studies, *Sleep Works* reveals an alternative history that rivals, if not surpasses, Freudian 'dream work' (135) in influencing some of the great modern and experimental literature from this period.

Klinger begins by outlining three key questions which unite the approaches taken by a number of prominent European intellectuals at the turn of the twentieth century, namely: 'What kind of activity is sleep? Who sleeps?' and 'How can we represent sleep?' (12). Framed against the present-day backdrop of 24/7 working cultures, optimisation of rest and an inundation of sleep health aids and advice, *Sleep Works* probes the 'edges' of sleep (4) by focusing on instances in which the human can only dimly apprehend the fall of their waking consciousness. Across his chosen examples, Klinger therefore locates various borderline states of 'slumbering, [...] dozing off, half sleep, hypnagogic experiences, sleep inertia, awakening, and sleep induced by soporifics' (8). Alongside a set of scientific and pharmacological case studies, Klinger explores the literature of Arthur Schnitzler, Marcel Proust, Franz Kafka and Rainer Maria Rilke to show how multiple fields were mutually 'grounded in the knowledge and experiences of their time' (8). Supplementing literary analysis with examples from psychology, neurology, physiology, pharmacology, and medicine, as well drawing from historical health-care advice and pharmaceutical industry archives, *Sleep Works* communicates with lucid

insight the pioneering work done by those who attempted to (re)shape a modern understanding of sleep.

An example of this approach occurs in an early section on psychiatrist and neurologist Constantin Von Economo who, in the 1920's, carried out investigations into the ongoing epidemic, *encephalitis lethargica*; a disease which produced catatonic and, in severe cases, coma-like symptoms in patients. Afflicting populations across Europe and North America and commonly referred to as 'sleeping sickness', Klinger recentralises the cultural impact of this relatively underwritten event as he assesses how Von Economo undertook an almost literary endeavour to consider the limits of human volition and theorise sleep as exhibiting an 'autonomous logic of its own' (30). Similarly, the burgeoning pharmaceutical industry which, by the early-twentieth century, had begun establishing a market to respond to an increase in cases of insomnia and sleep deprivation, is explored via a fascinating case study of Veronal – a soporific drug marketed to women in particular. Like how the 'sleeping sickness' epidemic generated tensions on a collective scale, the growing presence of mass-produced and, at times, widely available soporifics increased public consciousness of sleep-related health issues. Klinger adeptly transitions from these studies into his literary analysis and Arthur Schnitzler's *Fräulein Else* (1924) – a novella which adds to these tensions as it makes 'a literary intervention into debates about public health' while exploring 'the limits and possibilities of the interior monologue' (14). Merging the two strands of his study, this opening reading establishes Klinger's identification of literary texts which present 'a critical rewriting of contemporary discussions' (59) surrounding somnolent conditions.

Sleep Works remaining chapters take this critical blueprint to canonical European modernists Proust, Kafka and Rilke. In each analysis, Klinger makes a case for contemporary issues of sleep influencing authors literary aesthetics as well as drawing out their own contribution to cultural and scientific discourses of the moment. Considering *In Search of Lost*

Time's (1913) status as depicting the fall of sleep *par excellence*, Klinger confidently identifies a gap in scholarship which, he argues, has yet to connect Proust's poetic practices to the 'nascent empirical sleep sciences of his time and to the cultural milieu of the pharma industry' (73). Combined with insight into Proust's own experience of a 'neurasthenic half-sleep and [...] addiction to soporifics' (77), Klinger uncovers how such disruptive experiences prompted the author to undertake his own inquiries into the fringes of sleep (14). For his chapter on storied somnambulist Franz Kafka, Klinger suggests the writer's insomnia-driven creative practice works to undermine 'the supposed ontological stability of wakeful existence' and so problematizes 'the boundaries between waking and sleeping' (15). Recognising the emerging features of today's 24/7 society and its erosion of distinctions between working and resting hours, Klinger considers why Kafka's nocturnal writing was 'paramount for his literature' (98) just as his same compositional habits provoked an obsession with 'the edges of sleep' (99). Closing with an analysis of Rilke's 'overlooked sleep-focused poetry' (15), Klinger's reading of the collection *Sonnettes to Orpheus* (1922) reinforces how the poet arrives at his approach by way of Paul Valéry, who recognised sleep's potential to form an 'ontology of consciousness through moments of its interruption, receding, and recomposition' (118). In probing these disruptive liminal spaces, Rilke (and Valéry) arrive at a similar notion promoted by the sciences of their time: 'that sleep was not, as had previously been suggested, an absence or a stand-in for death' (128); rather, its study could be reframed as an illuminating exploration into the most obscure margins of waking life.

Throughout, Klinger pays close attention to the semantic and grammatical procedures produced by scientific voices as much as such features are part of *Sleep Works* more conventional literary analysis. Klinger's conclusion confirms how his study is generated through the coproduction of several 'interlocking representational systems' which combine to construct sleep as 'a scientific, aesthetic, philosophical, and political object' (134); the potential

behind which can open up the topic for future intersectional studies across other cultures and time periods. Thus, *Sleep Works* distinguishes how a specific set of scientific undertakings into the fringes of sleep necessitated an almost literary attention to language, while showing how contemporary literary figures were informed, inspired and unsettled by those same formative developments in modern sleep science.

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