figure portrayed in the 1896 edition, expresses a radical desire to 'go about freely by myself' and have 'a room of my own'.

While previous editions had already included an introduction to the text (Bernard Bergonzi's in the 1984 Dent edition, for instance), Withers is the first editor to have supplied a fully annotated version of this novel. The 191 notes on the text aim at making the novel accessible to those unfamiliar with its social, historical and geographical setting. Place names are contextualised (being given a graphic illustration in the map), slang words are defined, and contemporary references are clarified. The many literary figures and works cited within the pages of the novel are explained to the reader, and Withers takes time to provide historical context for a range of terms, events and political movements. This meticulous annotation facilitates students' approach to the work, especially those unfamiliar with the British context. However, British readers may find certain notes superfluous or inexact. For instance, a stone is defined as a measure of weight that is 'equal to *about* fourteen pounds', the term 'slap-up' is considered 'nineteenth-century slang', and a note on the various denominations of coin used in the novel – pounds, sovereigns, sixpence, shillings – states that a pound 'is the official currency of the United Kingdom and is roughly equivalent to an American dollar', without giving the modern equivalence or stating that these are historical denominations. Yet overall, the notes furnish a rich and valuable backdrop to the novel. Engagement with the text is further facilitated by the suggested discussion questions and essay topics at the end of the volume. These draw attention to the major themes of the novel and invite students to engage with them in the light of various novels by Wells or other authors and with the help of critical methodologies, such as ecocriticism or gender theory.

This volume updates Wells's classic cycling tale for a new audience, while actively encouraging critical engagement with the text. The introduction, bibliography, map and notes bring Wells's story to life for new audiences and facilitate the work of those approaching the novel as an object of study.

JEROME BOYD MAUNSELL, *PORTRAITS FROM LIFE: MODERNIST NOVELISTS AND AUTOBIOGRAPHY* (OXFORD: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2018) ISBN 978-0-19-878936-9 (HB) £20 [MICHAEL SHERBORNE]

I once read a mediocre book about autobiographies (fortunately for the author, I have forgotten its name) which treated Wells's 1934 *Experiment in*

Autobiography with derision. The author was so mirthful over Wells's opening description of himself as an 'originative intellectual worker' that he entirely failed to notice some crucial second thoughts a few pages later. On consideration, Wells realised that his 'persona' as a progressive intellectual was not the full Bertie, and resolved to provide a more wide-ranging account, allowing readers to make their own judgements about him. This decision transformed his autobiography from the pretentious, defensive tract which the forgotten critic had supposed it to be, into a layered, dialectical affair, offering many different views of its subject, which the reader has the interesting task of reconciling.

Thank heavens, then, for J. B. Maunsell's new study *Portraits from Life*, which takes Wells seriously as an artist and places him in the distinguished company of Joseph Conrad, Henry James, Ford Madox Ford, Edith Wharton, Gertrude Stein and Wyndham Lewis, devoting a chapter to each of them, together with a respectful nod to Virginia Woolf in the epilogue.

Maunsell's book, based on his doctoral thesis, is extremely well researched and draws on the whole range of his subjects' writings, considering not only self-contained autobiographies but also more general autobiographical writings, with the aim of bringing out how 'artful' these compositions are. Maunsell is interested in how his subjects' self-portraits are revised as their careers develop, most notably under the impact of the Great War. Since the authors' social circles overlapped, the book gains coherence through their occasional glimpses of each other, Wyndham Lewis, for example, encountering Wells in the Vienna Café, New Oxford Street, 'springing about in a suit too tight for him, as he inducted ladies into chairs'.

Whatever factual value the authors' accounts of themselves may have, their attempt to convey personal experience and emotion create an inevitable drift towards fiction and even a prioritising of metaphorical above literal truths. Ford Madox Ford notoriously made free with the facts and was lampooned for it by Wells in the 1933 novel *The Bulpington of Blup*. Critics, knowing this, are obliged to quote Ford's stories with caution, yet Maunsell notes they still quote him, since his anecdotes bring his era to life and sum up his contemporaries much more vividly than mere verisimilitude would have done. Such autobiographical invention goes hand in hand with suppression: some memories having to be excluded, due to conscience, self-defence or simply the laws of libel.

Neither reading nor writing an autobiography is as straightforward as it appears, therefore, and that goes double for autobiographical material used in fiction. Wells veered between denying that some of his novels reflected real events and boldly proclaiming that they did. On the one hand, suggests Maunsell, he wanted his novels to be appreciated in their own right; on the other, he felt an urgent need to depict social reality as he had experienced it. Maunsell writes thoughtfully on this aspect of Wells's work, but his main focus remains on the *Experiment in Autobiography*.

Maunsell realises that Wells is making a serious attempt to achieve a critical perspective on his persona. The more closely Wells focuses on the key events of his life, however, the more that resolute campaigner for progress dissolves into an impulsive, inconsistent human being. Wells expresses an honest bemusement at what he calls his track record of 'evasion and refusal'. Faced with the danger that his preferred identity will be unmasked as a self-deluding fiction, and in any case prevented by his ex-partners from writing frankly about his later love affairs, Wells passes quickly over the second half of his life. Fast-forwarding to his 1934 interviews with Stalin and F. D. Roosevelt enables him to end his story on a high note, claiming that, with this ascent into the perspective of global history, his 'ruffled persona has been restored'.

Maunsell is having none of this. He submits in evidence the third volume of the autobiography, with which Wells tinkered for the remainder of his life, published posthumously in 1984 as *H. G. Wells in Love*. To Maunsell, Wells's obsessive scrutiny of his sexual relationships 'opens up the void beneath all biography and autobiography, if not beneath all lives', showing the fragility of claims to consistency and integrity. Far from returning from Moscow confirmed in his mission to build the World State and at ease about his personal identification with human progress, Wells came back in a near-suicidal depression, having learned that his last great love Moura Budberg had been lying to him about her relationship with the Soviet government. What ensues is less originative intellectual work than 'pages of fevered dialogue and anxious soliloquy which seem torn from a spy romance'. Maunsell links Wells's disillusionment and his 1943 doctoral thesis which argues that every individual is made up of many overlapping personal systems, unified only by the stories we tell about ourselves. Wells includes it in *'42 to '44* (1944), a book whose opening chapter proclaims in its title 'The Irrational Behaviour of the Writer'.

Maunsell concludes that writers may be able to establish some kind of authoritative viewpoint in their fiction, but a comparably firm view in autobiography is unfeasible. He again cites *Wells in Love* on the contradiction between feeling oneself to have free will and finding oneself on inspection to be 'a creature of innate impulses', driven by unseen forces. Rather like Philip Larkin in his poem 'Dockery and Son', Maunsell proposes that as we approach death and look back over our lives, we find only ‘what something hidden from us chose’. This strikes me as a somewhat banal and overstated conclusion. (Wells did, after all, become a hugely influential intellectual journalist, whatever else he may have been.) However, Maunsell sets out his case with an extensive and deep knowledge of his subjects. Anyone who is interested in the seven writers under discussion is likely to learn something of value from this probing but appreciative examination of their work.

PETER J. BOWLER, *A HISTORY OF THE FUTURE: PROPHETS OF PROGRESS FROM H. G. WELLS TO ISAAC ASIMOV* (CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2017) ISBN 978-1-107-14873-4 (HB) £59.99, 978-1-316-60262-1 (PB) £19.99, E-BOOK $20 [MICHAEL SHERBORNE]

Do you remember the future? I do not mean the perennial mystery of what is to come, nor the current dispiriting forecasts of depleting natural resources, global warming and species extinction. I mean the exciting future that I used to read about when I was a schoolboy in the early 1960s, a future in which fears of overpopulation and nuclear war were eclipsed by cities of glass and steel, robots, jetpacks, monorails and interplanetary colonisation. This hi-tech future seemed to be materialising even as I read about it. In the boys’ comic, the *Eagle*, you could study a cut-away plan of the Mercury space capsule, then follow the adventures of Dan Dare, Pilot of the Future, as he battled an alien atop London’s Post Office Tower, built shortly before the story’s publication.

Once humans reached the Moon and found it to be a mere ball of rock, far less exciting than Wells’s *First Men in the Moon*, that glamorous vision of the future faded, replaced by ecological dread. (Maybe Elon Musk can yet revive it.) Hence, Peter J. Bowler confines his study of futurology to ‘the first two-thirds of the twentieth century’. In this ‘reasonably coherent period’, he argues, there was actually a balance between the optimistic outlook of scientists and science fiction writers like Isaac Asimov and Arthur C. Clarke, who were inspired by their experience of technological progress, and the pessimistic views of highbrow writers like Aldous Huxley and George Orwell, who feared that science would dehumanise us and facilitate new kinds of tyranny. Academics have tended to concentrate on the pessimistic side of the argument, but *A History of the Future* aims to be more even-handed.