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.

Working systematically through topics such as lifestyle, transport, spaceflight, war and the environment, Bowler draws on academic studies, science journalism, pulp SF and literary classics, looking at how ideas about the future were transmitted between groups and modified over time. For example, advocates of space travel like Willy Ley and Werner von Braun always presumed that a space station should be the first priority, followed by a Moon base, then by expeditions to other planets. In practice, national prestige and budget constraints mean the Moon was targeted for a few cursory visits and a rather ramshackle space station assembled many years later. However, Arthur C. Clarke, as a veteran of the British Interplanetary Society, scorned such cost-cutting and his film *2001* (1968) revives the earlier plan, showing a shuttle flight to a proper, wheel-shaped space station, followed by a journey to a Moon base, then an interplanetary expedition at the end of the process.

Inevitably, many ideas that seemed ahead of their time look dated now. The notion of atomic-powered aircraft seems fanciful, and the enthusiasm of the *Popular Mechanics* magazine for asbestos clothes positively alarming. More impressive is A. M. Low's 1924 prediction of the mobile phone ('cellphone' to American readers), together with his later insight into its antisocial possibilities: 'Why should I inflict a description of my mother's children to a radius of six yards, until all those around are driven to fury…?' It seems odd that, amid all the speculation, no one foresaw the miniaturisation of computing and the possibilities of the internet. SF heroes habitually travelled round the galaxies in faster-than-light spacecraft, yet plotted their routes with slide-rules and took their information from printed newspapers.

Bowler marshals his evidence well, yet his thematic approach means that he often makes identical points only a few pages apart. The scale of his endeavour also leaves little room for elaboration or qualification. He notes, for example, how plastic went from being considered a revolutionary new material to a cheap and shoddy one, but does not evaluate its actual historical significance. Discussing Asimov, he passes from that author's informed speculation about space travel and the Earth's limited resources, through his Three Laws of Robotics (not scientific, but a logical way of defusing robots' unscientifically monstrous image) to the 'psychohistory' of the *Foundation* trilogy (no connection with science at all), without troubling to note these crucial category shifts. It may be pedantic to complain that Bowler refers to *Crome Yellow* as *Chrome Yellow* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four* as *1984*, and that he confuses the authorship of *Billion Year Spree* and *Trillion Year Spree*, but

an Emeritus Professor of the History of Science at Queen's University Belfast should surely be setting a scholarly example.

The book's mixture of strong overview and shaky detail applies equally to its coverage of H. G. Wells. Bowler's main point is spot on, that Wells personified the struggle to formulate the future because he persuasively championed both optimistic and pessimistic views across a range of genres. Bowler is also familiar with an impressively wide range of Wells's work. Nonetheless, he thinks *A Modern Utopia* appeared in 1917, not 1905, and cites *When the Sleeper Wakes* and the revised *The Sleeper Awakes* interchangeably. Eventually, he tries to clarify matters by calling the former the 'original 1899 version', but immediately muddies them again by mislabelling it as *The Sleeper Awakes* and referring to the second version as 'the 1910 reprint'. He correctly says that Wells left university without a degree but does not add that he gained it just a few years later. He also makes a contentious, unsupported claim that Wells flirted with the totalitarianism of both the left (which is arguable) and the right (which is puzzling).

Overall, Bowler's study is an impressively wide-ranging piece of work – with, I should add, many excellent illustrations in black-and-white and colour – which succeeds both as a stimulating overview and as a work of reference. Its scale, however, means that it lacks the narrative flow to be a good read and leaves many points frustratingly underdeveloped. What of Bowler's conclusion? He confesses that he has been driven towards pessimism by the last fifty years of history – just like the rest of us. But what an exciting dream that future was, and how thought-provoking to revisit it!

WILL TATTERSDILL, *SCIENCE, FICTION, AND THE FIN-DE-SIÈCLE PERIODICAL PRESS* (CAMBRIDGE: CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2016) ISBN 978-1-107-14465-1 (HB) £64.99 [PATRICK PARRINDER]

As a young writer in the *fin-de-siècle*, H. G. Wells depended on the periodical press for his livelihood. One of the most memorable 'picshuas' in his *Experiment in Autobiography* (1934) is a comic strip showing the aspiring young author taking his very long 'tale' (a deft visual pun) out of the inkpot, seeing it chopped up by the editor of *Pearson's Magazine* on the 'serial chopping block', and finally swaggering back home with a money bag containing £200. Such, we are to believe, was the genesis of *The War of the Worlds* (1898). But, while there has been a good deal of scholarship on late Victorian periodicals in recent years, criticism of Wells has rarely offered more than a cursory glance at the magazines in which all of his major