the suspicion that he is responsible for the death of his only child, five-year-old Margaret: "It is a case of tubercular meningitis. The brain I gave her had in it the seeds of death" (222)).

I have tried to give you a taste of this well-organised and fascinating book which I particularly recommend to Stevenson scholars and to those interested in Victorian journalism. However, it deserves a greater audience than the usual academic volume because it deals so poignantly with the capricious nature of life – the most universal theme of all.

Judy McKenzie

British Future Fiction: 1700-1914, edited by I. F. Clarke. 8 vols. London: Pickering and Chatto, 2001; _Hong Kong Invaded: A '97 Nightmare_, by Gillian Bickley. Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2001.

Much can be learned about a past culture's present hopes and fears from the ways in which it imagined its future. In nineteenth-century Britain, fictive speculation became for the first time a prolific genre, its popularity stimulated by the heady momentum of political, social and, above all, technological change. I.F. Clarke, who may be said not only to have pioneered, but almost to have invented, the academic study of future fiction, has now selected and introduced an eight-volume assembly of reprinted texts ranging chronologically from 1763 (the anonymous and pedestrian *Reign of George VI*) to the eve of the First World War. Resisting the easy temptation to reproduce readily available works like *Erewhon* and *The War of the Worlds*, his purpose has been to make accessible a representative sample of the lesser-known purveyors of imaginative prophecy and in doing so he has placed all Victorianists in his debt.

As one might expect, nineteenth and early twentieth-century projectors laid heavy emphasis on an exponential growth of knowledge as the securest foundation for future progress. William Delisle Hay, for example, managed to sustain, in *Three Hundred Years Hence; or, A Voice from Posterity* (1881), a fantasy of nearly four hundred pages detailing the astonishing advances to which humankind could look forward if only it had the good sense to base its decisions on the logic dictated by science. By 2180, we will have learned to colonise both the subterranean regions and the sea so that all land (including the sites of former mountains, which will have been shaved down to plateaux) can be given over to the agricultural support of a proliferating but peaceful and harmonious population. Human diversity, to be sure, will have become a little attenuated because it will have been deemed expedient to exterminate "the Chinaman and the Negro" in favour of the superior Caucasian races, but this need not occasion sentimental regret since science will by then have established that the "inferior" peoples (like animals and birds, which will also have been all-but eliminated) belong to different species from the "White Man."

It would be reassuring to be able to conclude that Hay, despite being a New Zealander and a graduate of Melbourne University, had a taste for subversively

Swiftian irony; alas, he takes strenuous pains to dissociate himself from any such imputation, announcing triumphantly at one point that by the twenty-second century the extraction of sunshine from cucumbers, which defeated the savants of Lagado, will have become technically possible. Nevertheless, the in every sense colourless world Hay so enthusiastically elaborates serves to suggest that one writer's utopia may be another's nightmare. W.H. Hudson's *A Crystal Age* (1887) presents a future which has reverted to pastoral simplicity and in which all but the most rudimentary technologies – ploughing, woodcutting – have been forgotten. Unfortunately, sex has been forgotten too, except by a tiny number of designated breeders, so, as the accidental tourist from our troubled present discovers, there's not a lot to occupy the abundant leisure of the new Eden's cheery vegan inhabitants. In the end, Hudson's sterilised idyll (which, it gradually emerges, is modelled on the social arrangements of a beehive) seems almost as unappetising as Hay's Terrapolis.

The gulf between Hay's and Hudson's versions of a desirable future encapsulates late Victorian ambivalence about the benefits of unlimited technological progress. Other narratives more forthrightly project an apocalyptic end for human overreaching. Hay himself, clearly not averse to having a bob each way, produced in 1880 *The Doom of the Great City*, where the population of London is wiped out by a terminal industrial smog, and William Grove, in *The Wreck of a World* (1889), foresees a time in which machines will outdistance their human inventors and will wipe out everyone except for a small band of permanently anxious fugitives. It was not only technology itself, however, that humans had cause to fear, but their own tendency to degenerate physically and morally under the debilitating effects of the prosperity and luxury which technology ensured. Britain, as the world's leading imperial and industrial centre, was especially liable to a dangerous complacency, which hosts of writers sought to unsettle through depicting her successful invasion by French, Russian or German competitors. Lieutenant-Colonel George Chesney's *The Battle of Dorking* (1871), in which a Prussian expeditionary force decisively outguns an ill-prepared British defence in the heart of Surrey, provoked an extraordinary proliferation of sequels, expansions and rebuttals (many of them by military and naval officers of decidedly variable literary handiness) where England's capacity to resist attack was exhaustively canvassed. Some of these fictions are so lavish with the technical specification of weaponry as to be barely readable (James Eastwick's narrator in *The New Centurion* [1895] drools over his eponymous battleship in terms comprehensible, I would guess, only to historians of naval engineering); others invite comparison with Biggles rather than with *War and Peace*: "What do you think of my army?" inquires a German general of the captured hero in Lloyd Williams's *The Great Raid* (1909); "Ripping, sir" is the undaunted response. Even so, as Clarke points out, the invasion narrative, partly because of its local and familiar settings, partly because of its monitory placement in the very near future, offers opportunities for imaginative immediacy which are denied to the likes of Hay and Hudson, and these are densely exploited in R.W. Cole's remarkable novel *The Death Trap* (1907). Cole, with the precedent of Sedan clearly preying on his mind, describes the encirclement and destruction of the English army by overwhelmingly superior German forces in an

excruciating, even obsessive, detail reminiscent of Zola's *La Débâcle*, published fifteen years before. Idiot generals bicker at headquarters while their divisions are annihilated; cavalry regiments are flung away in pointless charges against massed guns; ill-equipped, underfed volunteers are fulsomely exhorted to die for their country by the commanders whose mismanagement has made their defeat inevitable. Indeed, although Cole still envisages warfare as a matter of mobility and manoeuvre rather than of deadlocked trench-systems, the futile carnage of his intensely imagined battlefields seems prescient of the horrors of the Western Front.

Quite apart from cretinous senior officers and obsolete ordnance, the British tend to owe their defeat in these cautionary tales to the effeteness of their political leaders and to the enervation of the working-class men who make up their armies. But there were other threats to insecure masculinity than uppish machines and foreign invaders. In Arthur Fox-Davies's *The Sex Triumphant* (1909), women finally secure the vote by surrounding a recalcitrant Parliament with well-armed mercenaries and then playfully castrating an especially vehement anti-suffragist M.P. Just as it was divided over the outcomes of technological advance and the extent of Britain's military weakness, turn-of-the-century future fiction was undecided about Women's Rights. Fox-Davies seems to be an advocate for the extension of the franchise but his heroine, having secured her objective as a point of principle, lapses into happily subordinate motherhood. Walter Besant, conversely, in *The Revolt of Man* (1890), appears to be producing a comic antifeminist dystopia: the country is mismanaged by a House of Peeresses chosen through competitive examination and men have been relegated to the status of domestic drudges. However, Besant's satirical inversion of the doctrine of separate spheres, which he expects to seem unnatural because (as he regularly reminds his audience) men have superior intellectual abilities, might almost as easily be read against its grain as an indictment of any rigid demarcation between gender-roles and is thus open for possible recruitment as a protest against women's relegation to the bedroom and the kitchen.

Clarke's collection (and there is far more in these eight volumes than I have had space to touch on here) taps a rich vein of fictional material which Victorianists have been all too inclined to overlook in their somewhat monocular focus on the vicissitudes of canonical realism, and his erudite introductions to each volume and to each text, taken together, form a coherent survey with which to supplement his indispensable *Voices Prophesying War 1763-1984* (1966) and *The Pattern of Expectation 1644-2001* (1979). If an exhausted reader might occasionally question the value of some of Clarke's inclusions – early science fiction is far too fond of airily attributing quantum leaps in technology to some high-sounding but undefined discovery – their culturally symptomatic importance is unmistakable. My sole cavil, and it's a slight one, is prompted by Clarke's introduction to *The Battle of Dorking* in which he attributes the end of the first phase of "future war" stories to the Battle of Waterloo, "when the British squares repulsed the last assault of the Old Guard against the allied positions in front of Mont S. Jean." I'm no military analyst, but I suspect that if the British infantry really *had* met the Old Guard in squares, the battle's

outcome, and thus the future history of the nineteenth century, would have been very different.

Clarke is once again laid under contribution to write a preface for Gillian Bickley's *Hong Kong Invaded! A '97 Nightmare* which is, essentially, an edition of an anonymous invasion story called *The Back Door*, serialised in *The China Mail* in 1897 and shortly afterwards reprinted as a pamphlet. This time, it's a nefarious consortium of French and Russian forces that assaults a scandalously under prepared target; the brave defenders are able to put up a resolute struggle, of course, for "In hand to hand fighting the under-sized Crapauds were but a poor match for the long lean Pathans and beef-fed Britishers," but weight of numbers finally tells and the story ends with the Union Jack being hauled down. Gillian Bickley has edited this slight performance to within an inch of its pallid life, and her commentary fattens a text of about sixty pages into a book of three hundred. There's an Introduction which alleges that *The Back Door*'s use of a narrative frame aligns it with *The Taming of the Shrew* and (weirdly) *Jane Eyre*; there are 765 notes on the Introduction and text, which elucidate such mysteries as "odds" ("a gambling term"), and these are followed by a further 393 notes to the nine appendices; there are newly drawn illustrations (accompanied by special notes of their own), maps, photographs, keys. One can only marvel at the editor's indefatigable industry, but one has also to question whether *The Back Door* really merits the sort of treatment generally accorded only to Shakespeare and the Bible. Still, the book will almost certainly become essential reading for everyone interested in Hong Kong's defence capability during the late 1890s.

Robert Dingley

***New Woman Poets: An Anthology*, edited and introduced by Linda Hughes. Lost Chords No 1, The Eighteen Nineties Society, London, 2001; *Michael Field and Poetic Identity with a Biography*, by Marion Thain, Occasional Series No 9, The Eighteen Nineties Society, London 2000.**

Linda Hughes is an established American scholar of distinction in the field of nineteenth-century British studies. Her recent work focussing on recovering the poetry of that intriguing figure, Rosamund Marriott Watson, who wrote under the pseudonym Graham R. Tomson in the early part of her career, later switching signatures as often as she switched husbands, has been exemplary in its combination of detailed scholarship and finely nuanced readings. This delightful anthology shows much of the same kind of quality. It is aimed at the undergraduate student, with a very clear and sensibly organised introduction and disposition of contents into thematic sections. Unfortunately, due no doubt to series restrictions and cost-cutting, there is no proper index, only a list of poets with page numbers at the end (and the page numbers are all one off the true, no doubt a result of the exigencies of the publication process). It would have been good to have a contents list of the thematic sections and an index of first lines.