

BARBARA BLACK. *A Room of His Own: A Literary-Cultural Study of Victorian Clubland*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012. Pp. 328. \$59.95 (cloth).
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At the dawn of the twentieth century, Barbara Black tells us, there were about two hundred all-male private clubs in London. The great majority had been created in the past ninety years, half in the past thirty. In one contemporary estimation, perhaps 200,000 men associated with Britain's national and professional elites belonged to one or more. Black's goal in this far-ranging study is to write "the biography of an institution" (30) that was, in her depiction, as important to the construction of identities among men born or aspiring to the national elite as were the public schools, Oxbridge, or the emerging professional organizations of the era. Over the long Victorian century, private clubs of male sociability shifted from venues of libertine pursuit to shapers of gentlemanly respectability and then to sites of enactment of the gender anxieties and transgressive behaviors of the fin-de-siècle (30). Even as their ambiance and institutional structure evolved, the "associational culture of Victorian London's clubs" constituted "one of the great social forces of an emergent modernity" (2), an assertion Black persuasively sustains through individual chapters on the intersection of clubland with print culture, imperial expansion, parliamentary maneuvering, and various forms of swindles and misbehavior.

At the level of social history, a subject like clubland lends itself to opulent and/or eccentric detail—one function of clubs, after all, was the extension of aristocratic luxury to the professional classes. Black devotes the requisite chapter to loving reconstructions of culinary delights, smoking practices, billiards and gambling, architectural detail, blackballing, and the coziness of reading rooms filled with esoteric books and the latest news. She has spent time in the archives of the Garrick, the Travellers, and the Reform clubs, and provides good overviews of the different types of associational connections one could forge by being admitted to one of these exclusive venues: various worlds of literature, fashion and gaming, politics, sports, the military service, or empire travel.

Engaging as these forays are, the strength of the book emerges when Black begins to analyze clubland as a "pervasive cultural site and popular literary trope" (32). She provides good evidence, some of it statistical, to demonstrate how prominently the world of clubs figured in the "chit-chat" columns of the daily press, periodical essays, and the book-length minutiae of men-about-town like George Augustus Sala and Ralph Nevill. She makes an interesting case for the ways that information—secret, gossip, financially or politically valuable—circulated through both clubland and the metropolitan press, making them "kindred institutions to print-capitalism" (113). Using Benedict Anderson's concept of "imagined communities," Jürgen Habermas and Richard Sennett on "public spheres," and modern network theory, Black argues for the importance of metropolitan clubland in constructing a "class-encoded masculine identity" (118) based on an urbane self-awareness of access to insider knowledge and cultural capital. An illuminating chapter explores clubs as sites crucial to a hero's rise or eclipse in the novels of Disraeli, Thackeray (*Pendennis*), and Trollope (*Phineas Finn* and *The Prime Minister*). These authors themselves used club membership to affirm insider status. Their literary representations of worlds they knew firsthand raise "fascinating questions about the nature of sociability and masculinity, the process of social affiliation, the tensions of collective existence, and the business of politics and the politics of business that churn and bubble within commercial life" (110).

Another chapter argues for clubland's importance in creating Britishness in the form of an imperial elite accustomed to dividing populations into us and them: "fraternal bonding and colonial loyalty were mutually constitutive" (154). The works of Rudyard Kipling and Winston Churchill, Thomas De Quincey and Richard Burton are used to demonstrate that heroic achievement for the Victorian male was often not presented as a "one-man show," but rather as the product of performance within "impressive web[s] of affiliation" created in

part by clubland (165). Black is well grounded in the scholarly literature on performativity and social construction of gender. Her chapter on clubland in the era of Oscar Wilde and Max Beer-bohm takes us beyond the role of clubs in enabling a flight from domesticity to their importance in creating a new, post-Victorian normative manhood that was almost impossibly cosmopolitan, urbane, leisured, and paradoxical.

Although Black begins and ends this fine study with ruminations on the universal human “craving for belonging—to possess and to enjoy what we might call exclusive sociability” (236), the strength of her work lies in establishing Victorian men’s clubs as a culturally specific response to the transformations of British society at a particular phase of modernization. It provides an interesting companion piece to Amy Milne-Smith’s *London Clubland: A Cultural History of Gender and Class in Late-Victorian Britain* (2011), which covers some of the same ground but uses memoirs and letters more than novelistic representations to probe how the “men in the bow window” actually experienced and used their exclusive enclaves, particularly as venues for dealing with the powerful gendered realities of Victorian society. For a somewhat different reading of the psychological resonances of these associations, it is useful to consult William Lubenow’s *Liberal Intellectuals and Public Culture in Modern Britain, 1815–1914* (2010), especially his chapter on clubs and societies. Lubenow argues for the society-wide ramifications of what can be seen as clubland’s exclusive convivialities in creating expectations of trust, of reasoned discourse, and of emotional expression that underlie liberal society itself. In this sense, clubs, an alternative to family, church, and state identifications, could serve some of the functions in Britain that de Tocqueville saw local organizations performing in the American republic, creating men who learned ways of getting along with other men—possibly even adversaries—in these bridge spaces between private and civic spheres. All three works show that London clubland was no monolithic entity for the men of the metropolitan elite, even as it was a powerful shaper of their adult homosocial experiences.

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JONATHAN BOFF *Winning and Losing on the Western Front: The British Third Army and the Defeat of Germany in 1918*. Cambridge Military Histories series. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012. Pp. 309. \$99.00 (cloth).
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On 8 August 1918, the British army and its allies opened an offensive that ultimately resulted in the German army’s defeat. Although the campaign, known as the “Hundred Days,” ended more than four years of conflict, historians have shown limited interest in the offensive, while instead focusing on the First World War’s earlier battles. Jonathan Boff’s *Winning and Losing on the Western Front* represents an important step toward remedying this oversight. Through a comparative analysis of the British Third Army and the German Second and Seventeenth armies it faced, Boff provides a detailed account of the First World War’s final stages while challenging the view that Germany’s defeat had more to do with the German army’s internal collapse than with British effectiveness in the field.

Boff’s study revolves around an analysis of the Third Army’s ability to implement combined arms tactics and sustain operational tempo, or “the rate or rhythm of activity relative to the enemy” (6). He establishes that the German army had lost the initiative by summer 1918 and was incapable of replacing losses as it retreated. The British force came to enjoy a significant manpower advantage that it maintained due to its more effective ability to replace casualties. Both the Germans and the British, however, were dissatisfied with the quality of their replacements. According to Boff, the critical difference was that numerical superiority