

NANCY W. ELLENBERGER. *Balfour's World, Aristocracy and Political Culture at the Fin de Siècle*. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2015. Pp. 430. \$49.95 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2017.37

In *Balfour's World, Aristocracy and Political Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, Nancy Ellenberger examines the social world and interactions of a group of upper-class men and women in late-nineteenth century Britain. The principal characters are Arthur Balfour, George Pembroke, George Wyndham, Laura and Margot Tenant, and Mary Elcho, though many other figures also receive some attention. Most of them were members of the informal group known as the Souls because of their penchant for discussing their personal and emotional views with each other in a nonpartisan way. The opening section of the book dwells particularly on gendered identities, whereas the focus of the later chapters moves from metropolitan drawing rooms to country house parties and from political activities to the role of the press in revealing Society scandals. The text draws on an extensive cache of primary sources, principally letters and diaries, and a wide range of secondary sources. Ellenberger's command of the factual detail, both social and political, is generally assured, and she includes many interesting vignettes that illuminate the social mores of the era. One example, out of many possibilities, is the passage on the opportunities presented by hunting for unsupervised gender relations. The book is nicely produced, appropriately illustrated, and reasonably priced. In all those respects, the study has much to commend it.

On the other hand, the arrangement of the book, which Ellenberger describes as "a braided narrative" (11), is somewhat confusing. Her frequent switching from one character to another aids comparison but also impedes a clear narrative. Furthermore, the cast of characters is rather too wide and the incidents sometimes too minor or obscure to always arouse interest. Her tendency to speculate about the personal feelings of the various characters is unhistorical, and Ellenberger occasionally employs overblown language. Her claim, for example, that George Wyndham described his ability to sway a mass audience "in terms that implied the self-annihilation of the sexual act" (287) is pure psychobabble. The description of Lord Salisbury as presiding over the Indian famine gives an unjustified impression of his responsibility for that tragedy.

Balfour is the central figure, and Ellenberger presents a balanced account of his complex and enigmatic character. She also draws attention to his dependence on George Wyndham for political information and assistance in the later 1880s. On the other hand, Balfour's relations with his uncle Lord Salisbury, the prime minister, and with the younger members of the Cecil clan are neglected. That omission accords with Ellenberger's terms of reference but it gives a one-sided view of Balfour's world. Ellenberger ends her account in 1895, seven years before Balfour became prime minister. A comparison of his social life before and after he became premier would have been illuminating. The young Balfour played a crucial role in introducing and promoting golf to Britain's governing class, but his passion for the game gets only a passing mention. Balfour's Scottish identity is also neglected although it was an important component of his personality. He was only one of a number of Anglicized Scots who became prominent in Britain's governing elite around the turn of the century.

Ellenberger's focus on the *aristocratic* character of political culture is somewhat misplaced. As she admits, the number of aristocrats who were active politicians declined rapidly in the late Victorian era due in part to the expansion of the electorate and in part to a decline in their willingness to engage in public service. Consequently, elite political society was no longer mainly the preserve of the aristocracy. That change was illustrated by Margot Tennant's marriage, not to an aristocrat, but to the middle-class lawyer and Liberal minister H. H. Asquith. Ellenberger's use of the phrase *fin de siècle* is also questionable. That term originally referred to the decadent movement in French literature and art and was absent from contemporary British political society and discourse.

Ellenberger ends the book with a brief epilogue that stresses the change in “emotional expression” (301) that characterized Balfour’s generation and the blurring of lines between the social classes. Nevertheless, Ellenberger notes that endogamy and friendship within the group remained strong even in the next generation, which undermines the significance of the previous point. *Balfour’s World* is a work of considerable scholarship that illuminates many particular issues, but it offers no clearly demonstrated general conclusions.

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FRANCES FLANAGAN. *Remembering the Revolution: Dissent, Culture, and Nationalism in the Irish Free State*. Oxford Historical Monographs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. 249. \$100.00 (cloth).

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The historiography of the Irish Revolution is experiencing a memory boom. This is due in part to the opening of two remarkable archives: the Bureau of Military History, made available to researchers in 2003 and more recently digitized; and the Military Service Pensions Collection, released in phases since 2014. While providing possibly the most comprehensive body of sources on any modern revolution, these oral and written statements, recorded by veterans long after the Irish Revolution of 1916–1923, throw up both methodological challenges and valuable opportunities for understanding how memory mediates history. The centenary of the Easter Rising has also prompted a wave of second- and third-generation family memoirs, as well as a growing body of research on the post-independence experiences of the wives and children of leading revolutionaries.

The focus of historians of the Irish Revolution has in addition broadened to encompass the exhilarating years of ferment described by Roy Foster as the “pre-revolution” (*Vivid Faces: The Revolutionary Generation in Ireland 1890–1923* [2014]) as well as the disappointments and frustrations of the postrevolutionary era. One theme that has emerged strongly from these shifting perspectives is the notion of the “lost revolution,” the process by which progressive impulses, including secularism, feminism, and socialism, were obscured as Catholic, socially conservative, and nationalistic representations of the revolution gained ground after independence. In *Remembering the Revolution*, a fascinating and perceptive study, Frances Flanagan engages with many of these concerns, while further widening the lens by considering them within a broader European context.

The most original aspect of this beautifully written study is Flanagan’s close focus on writings on the Irish revolution published during the 1920s and 1930s, and her ability to situate these narratives within a finely nuanced set of biographical, political, intellectual, and transnational contexts. Flanagan structures the book around studies of fictional and historical writings by four individuals: former Irish Volunteer leader Eimar O’Duffy; Fenian turned civil servant P. S. O’Hegarty; artist and theosophist George Russell; and the former St. Enda’s boy and journalist Desmond Ryan. None of them were central to the revolution (only Ryan had fought in the Easter Rising) or even to the shaping of its historiography; they can be seen rather as representative of a wider body of intellectuals who lost out in different ways under independence. Flanagan carefully traces how they interpreted the revolution in later life and how and why their narratives changed over time. Her sophisticated, ambitious, and ultimately rewarding aim is to delineate “the complex arcs of disillusionment” they experienced and to map “the dense webs of influence, expectation, and allegiance they inhabited that stretched from Dublin to Moscow, childhood to adulthood, and through a variety of sacred narratives” (49).