Alex Csiszar, The Scientific Journal: Authorship and the Politics of Knowledge in the Nineteenth Century

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2018. Pp. 368. ISBN 978-0-2265-5323-8. $45.00 (hardback). ISBN 978-0-2267-5250-1. $35.00 (paperback).

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Certain books are as valuable for what they reveal about our professional inheritance as for what they tell us about the history of science. This is one of those books. It is impossible to read *The Scientific Journal* without reflecting upon the mechanisms of academic publishing today. As such this book is a timely reminder that there is nothing natural or inexorable about the current status of the scientific journal article. Alex Csiszar is attentive to the contemporary relevance this fact. As he argues in his conclusion, all too often those who want to preserve the scientific journal in its current form as well as those who want to dismantle the for-profit publishing industry both base their arguments on an ideal of the journal article which is premised 'on impoverished conceptions of the dynamics of scientific life' (p. 288). Csiszar's provocation to rethink the myth of the scientific journal is particularly pertinent in the current moment, given the impact that the COVID-19 pandemic has had on scientific and academic publishing.

Yet this rich and detailed book is above all else a work of history. And as a whole the work explains why the scientific journal came to be endowed with so much 'epistemic weight', as well as how the single-authored journal article obtained its esteemed and authoritative position at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of scientific print media (p. 2). He strategically limits his analysis to developments in nineteenth-century France and England, focusing especially on the publication strategies of the Royal Academy of Sciences in Paris and the Royal Society in London. This enables him to uncover the crucial ways that these elite scientific institutions responded to challenges that new forms of publishing posed to their near-hegemonic control over the legitimation and dissemination of scientific knowledge. Chapter 2, for example, explains how these institutions initially reacted against the presence of reporters at society meetings, the publication of scientific findings in the popular press, and the proliferation of commercial scientific journals, before embracing this genre of print by issuing their own 'proceedings' or *comptes rendus* (p. 68). As Csiszar astutely points out, this was a move that helped the societies remain relevant, but it also served to legitimize the very commercial and popular scientific periodicals with which these society volumes were designed to compete.

Chapters 3 and 4 then highlight some of the consequences of this new approach. Together they trace how and why authorship and publication became central for the communication and validation of scientific knowledge in new ways as the written periodical took precedence over the society meeting and the oral presentation. This is especially vivid in Csiszar's discussion of priority disputes, in which the published statement took precedence over not just the presentation but also the private letter and the unpublished manuscript. Revisiting the well-known conflict over the discovery of Neptune in 1846, he reveals not only what this dispute tells us about how conceptions of discovery, evidence and authorship were changing at mid-century, but also the extent to which 'geopolitics mattered in questions of scientific publicity' (p. 193).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087421000455 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Chapter 5 is arguably the most crucial of the book. In it Csiszar demonstrates how the Royal Society in London engaged in a process of 'canon formation' through the production of its *Catalogue of Scientific Papers* in the 1850s, the first volume of which appeared in 1866 (p. 224). It was this project that identified the journal article as the basic unit of scientific knowledge by excluding other forms of print media such as the monograph or encyclopedia entry from consideration. Organizing the catalogue by author name also reified earlier determinations about the importance of authorship, which meant that the production of articles became an even more essential part of the professional persona of a scientist. This, Csiszar argues, contributed to the notion 'of scientific periodicals as collections of original papers attributed to individual authors' more than any individual text (p. 238). It is here that we can see crystalize most clearly the modern ideal of the scientific journal as both a medium through which new knowledge is advanced and the repository of all scientific knowledge.

Yet this is only one of the threads in Csiszar's book upon which this review could have focused. There are many other compelling lines of investigation running through Csiszar's analysis, criss-crossing the book in productive and dynamic ways. Questions about the openness and accessibility of science, as well as about the public for whom a given text was written, reoccur throughout the book. So, too, do discussions about the impact that evolving political circumstances had on the politics of knowledge. Especially in France, for example, censorship laws and government regulations influenced the kinds of publication that could appear in a given moment. And although Csiszar's book is explicitly not an economic history of scientific print media, socio-economic factors that limited or facilitated access to both the means and the products of publishing feature in virtually every chapter.

This book is undoubtedly a valuable contribution to the history of scientific publishing and the history of science. Clearly and cogently written, this volume is engaging to read. Non-specialists may, however, find the breadth of this work disorienting and the depth daunting. Some readers will also, of course, kvetch about the exclusion of various topics near and dear to their own hearts. Thus, even though the reviewer understands why Germany was excluded from this analysis, she cannot help but think that further attention to Central European journals would have been especially productive. But this is arguably another strength of the work. Instead of cordoning off an area of research as completed, *The Scientific Journal* invites others to further inquiry.

doi:10.1017/S0007087421000455

Rebecca Earle, Feeding the People: The Politics of the Potato

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 308. ISBN 978-1-1086-8845-1. £17.99 (hardback).

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Feeding the People is a history of the potato, but at a more intimate level it is a history of the tension between two ideas most of us hold to be true, however contradictory they