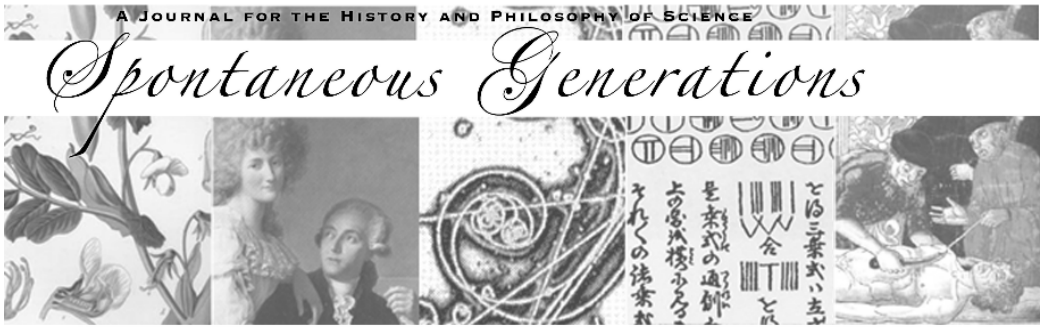

REVIEW: Melinda Baldwin, *Making Nature: The History of a Scientific Journal*

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Reviews

Melinda Baldwin *Making Nature: The History of a Scientific Journal*. 309 pp. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 2015.

Andrew I. Oakes*

There aren't many scholarly books that begin with a warning to the reader. Historian Melinda Baldwin does just that by cautioning her readers upfront that they will be disappointed if they think her book will reveal the secret of getting an article published in the journal *Nature*, the subject of her narrative. We learn later on that, in the early twenty-first century, *Nature* rejects about 92 percent of submissions, whereas they accepted almost anything in the early years following its first publication on 4 November 1869. The author positions the journal as "arguably the world's most prestigious scientific journal" (p. 21). Her book-length treatment of this now 147-year old academic weekly focuses almost exclusively on the paper edition, although in the conclusion of her book she does discuss the rise of electronic publishing. Here she touches on such festering issues as peer-reviewing, restricted knowledge access, hefty subscription rates, and paying twice for knowledge—for articles whose research was already funded by taxpayer-supported academies, and other publicly subsidised institutions, followed by the cost of a full subscription or article purchases. Although many of these issues are modern-day concerns facing electronic academic publishing, they will eventually work themselves out in the market place as they normally do over time.

To be sure, with her thoroughly solid research and an engaging writing style, Baldwin has produced an outstanding account of the life, times, and evolution of a British journal of science that has published continuously and profitably for a surprisingly long period with an enormously effective international impact. Some scholarly books may warrant only a single read-through. Others, on the other hand, call out for multiple attention and a much deeper study. Such is the case with Baldwin's *Making Nature: The History of a Scientific Journal*. The book is indeed a *tour de force* in its genre and worthy of detailed reading as well as wide dissemination among undergraduate and graduate students, and the practitioners/teachers

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of the history of science. The book is nothing less than an informational gem in recounting the origins and evolution of *Nature*, this prestigious science journal that began its publishing life in the latter half of the nineteenth century in Victorian London and, to date, has only had seven of editors-in-chief—namely such luminaries as astronomer Sir Norman Lockyer (1869-1919), science writer Sir Richard Gregory (1919-1939), co-editors agronomist A.J.V Gale (1939-1962) and botanist L.J.F. Brimble (1939-1965), physicist Sir John Maddox (1966-1973), geophysicist David Davies (1973-1980), physicist Sir John Maddox (1980-1995), and, currently, physicist Philip Campbell (1995-present).

Baldwin succeeds admirably in her goal of not simply listing "all the important papers that *Nature* has published," but rather examining how "*Nature* has changed over time, what role it has played within the scientific community at different points in history, and how *Nature* both responded to and influenced changes in science" (p. 1). To the historian and the student, the book's value rests in how Baldwin organizes the narrative and unpacks the history of the journal itself. *Making Nature* features eight chapters in which the author studies the shifting audiences and contributors; the changing of the British scientific guard; the application of the word "scientist"; the politics of the interwar period (the First and Second world wars); the concept of intellectual freedom; the impact of the Cold War; the rise of the United States as a scientific powerhouse; and the issue of scientific self-policing in the 1980s.

Making Nature is Baldwin's first book, a follow-up to her Princeton University doctoral dissertation, "Nature and the Making of a Scientific Community, 1869-1939," completed in September 2010. A point of interest the author makes is that "journals have played almost no role in the literature on early twentieth-century scientific internationalism" (p. 12). She cites Professor Nikolai Krementsov, of the Institute for the History and Philosophy of Science and Technology at the University of Toronto, as noting in a recent book on international genetics congresses that journals are notably absent from the writing of scholars who have studied internationalism by looking only at international associations, research facilities, philanthropies, and societies. With her *Making Nature*, Baldwin opens up a fresh opportunity for a clearer understanding of how the history of science is made. In her "Note to the Reader," she argues that "*Nature*'s history reveals a lot about how the rules that govern science have evolved over time. It also reveals how scientific practitioners have thought about their place in society" (p. 2). She also underlines that "*Nature*'s editorial staff, readers, and scientific contributors were deeply aware of science's relationship with politics, culture, and the social order" (p. 2).

Making Nature offers an extensive bibliography of primary and secondary

sources, and is accompanied by comprehensive endnotes and commentary for each of its sections.

One of the audiences Baldwin hopes will read her book are the regular readers of *Nature*, whom she identifies as practicing scientists, science journalists, and others who love science. If they do so, Baldwin will certainly sell a lot of copies, and this group of readers will not be disappointed with a good addition to their library collection.

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